# Hegel and Speculative Realism

CHARLES WILLIAM JOHNS

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# 1

# Introduction: Hegel and Speculative Realism

## Analytic/Continental

This book tracks the Hegelian influences negated (denied/repressed) or *negating the negated* (affirmed or surrendered to) by a group of independent philosophers we once called 'The Speculative Realists'. Such a group acquired its name from a conference held at Goldsmiths College, London, England in 2007.[1]

The workshop, and subsequently the name, was composed of Quentin Meillassoux (France), Graham Harman (US), Ray Brassier (UK) and Iain Hamilton Grant (UK). In varying degrees,[2] we could call these four thinkers 'Continental' philosophers. However, this term is ambiguous and usually misleading. The term 'Continental' is in one sense defined in

[1] The conference was initiated by Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano and the other three contributors obliged. It was held at Toscano's stomping ground (and my own) at Goldsmiths University, London, UK on 27th April 2007 with the support of Falmouth publishing house Urbanomic.

[2] I would describe Meillassoux as the most analytically inclined, followed by Brassier, with Hamilton-Grant coming in close third, and finally Harman as fourth.

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*contradistinction* to that of the *analytic* tradition in England (roughly inaugurated at the beginning of the twentieth century) and in-fact was named so somewhat pejoratively by the English. However, the 'idealism' of continental Europe in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, which analytic figures such as Russell and G.E. Moore reacted against, feels worlds away from both the continental Nietzschean 'anti-philosophy'[3] of the late nineteenth century, the continental structuralism of the twentieth century, and the continental post-structuralism (and neo-materialism) of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Furthermore, that philosophers such as Robert Brandom take equal inspiration from the analytic and the continental tradition makes it harder to view the 'divide' in all its ostensible polemicism. In-fact, there is evidence that the four members of the speculative realist movement had—at the very least—dabbled with 'analytic' figures such as Kripke,[4] Wittgenstein, Hume,[5] and Paul and Patricia Churchland.

Regarding *Hegel*, we all know how much Bertrand Russell—the father of analytic philosophy—and G.E. Moore looked unfavourably towards the German philosopher of the absolute,[6] hence the analytic/continental divide is thoroughly ingrained from the outset. However, we must not forget those 'British Idealists' before Russell, who tried to salvage the best of Hegel (and Kant for that matter) on British soil and hence the divide is much more artificial than one may have first thought.

So, should we keep up what Hegel would possibly call a 'dialectic' of knowledge regarding the analytic and continental traditions? If we follow the temptation of any philosophy student when asked this question; to look up the differences between 'Analytical' and 'Continental' philosophy' on, say, Wikipedia, the second paragraph down on the 'Continental Philosophy' page will suggest that;

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[3] Using Alain Badiou's terminology; Alain Badiou, Nietzsche's Anti-Philosophy I, 1992–1993 Seminar. See https://doi.org/10.17613/xew0-jy05.

[4] Kripke is American but allies himself with the analytic tradition.

[5] The Empiricism of the Logical Positivists is heavily indebted to Hume.

[6] For example; "Hegel thought that, if enough was known about a thing to distinguish it from all other things, then all its properties could be inferred by logic. This was a mistake, and from this mistake arose the whole edifice of his system. This illustrates an important truth, namely, that the worse your logic, the more interesting the consequences." Russell, Bertrand, History of Western Philosophy.

> (T)he primary distinguishing feature between continental philosophy and analytic philosophy are their opposing attitudes to objectivity. The notion that the universe has a material existence regardless of whether humans exist or not, is rejected by foremost Continental philosophers (starting with Immanuel Kant), and accepted by Analytic philosophers.[7]

Interestingly enough, it is possibly the opposite opinion today; Continental materialists of recent may tend to broaden the philosophical language of materiality in general, but the desire to affirm a material reality 'as it is' (outside of the Kantian problematic of the phenomenal/noumenal division) is found in many of the pages of Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Berson, Gilles Deleuze, Francois Lyotard and Michel Foucault (and appears in the writings of all four[8] of our speculative realists). Inversely, we are also seeing many analytic philosophers, like Nelson Goodman,[9] espouse a form of *irrealism* whilst many continental philosophers are re-engaging with the analytical philosophers fortitude for mathematical reasoning/logic such as Alain Badiou.[10]

It has also become glaringly obvious that many figures belonging to the so-called continental tradition have ushered-in new concepts of posthumanism[11] and the anthropocene[12] which affirm the earth's autonomy as a real ecological object outside of the ontological interactionism of Kantian and Hegelian philosophy (albeit often one that emphasises our *ecological effect* upon the world whilst simultaneously displacing and disavowing the notion of the 'human' as the only necessary, privileged centre for philosophical endeavour).

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[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental_philosophy.

[8] One could argue that Ray Brassier's 'transcendental nihilism' does not contradict the existence of matter construed in the above sense. Although Harman looks unfavourably towards *materialism* (usually due to its act of undermining), he would not refute the existence of objects independent of human existence. It is much plainer to see Meillassoux's insistence on a description of matter as indifferent to human experience (the arche-fossil for example). Grant's 'geological turn' implies a whole wealth of activity ensuing prior to—and outside of—human existence upon earth.

[9] Goodman represents that encouraging strand of American philosophy that mixes analytic and continental trends.

[10] See Badiou, Alain, Being and Event, Continuum, 2006.

[11] For example, see; Roden, David, Posthuman LifePhilosophy at the Edge of the Human, Routledge, 2015.

[12] For example, see; Morton, Timothy, Dark Ecology, Columbia University Press, 2018.

Furthermore, American analytic philosopher Scott Soames is surely seen as simply incorrect when he defines analytic philosophy in contra-distinction to continental philosophy as "aiming at truth and knowledge, as opposed to moral or spiritual improvement", later suggesting that "the goal in analytic philosophy is to discover what is true, not to provide a useful recipe for living one's life".[13]

One quick look at the current terrain of continental philosophy (from circa 2000 onwards) and one will find no primary evidence of how to live one's life accordingly. Instead, we are in the throes of master ontologists who wish to post-critically[14] describe the fundamental constituents of the universe and how knowledge is possible.[15] Perhaps past continental philosophers such as Kierkergaard and Nietzsche would occupy themselves with such *existential* problems (as well as elements of the late Foucault[16]), but speculative realist Ray Brassier encapsulates the current attitude of the era by stating that "I am a nihilist because I still believe in truth",[17] which could be loosely interpreted to mean that we—as contemporary philosophers—will not tolerate the various relativistic, linguistic, deconstructivist, post-modern and phenomenological narratives and constructions of truth (or post/non-truth), and instead have the stubborn ambition to seek reality *absolutely* or 'in-itself' and believe that this ambition is not impossible because of some kind of "correlationist" credo, Zizekian 'blind spot' or 'entanglement theory' of reality.

Half the problem may be that the irrecoverable 'truth' that we so desire does not conform to the vocabulary of previous definitions we have at our disposal; whilst Brassier has (epistemologically) suggested that there is a difference between what something 'is' and what that something 'means' (the latter usually existing before the former), Harman equally

[13] Soames, Scott (2003). The dawn of analysis (2nd print., 1st papers. print. ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. pp. xiii–xvii. ISBN 978-0-691-11573-3.

[14] A term I use to suggest a return to asking big ontological questions whilst acknowledging the 'sublation' of pre-critical philosophy, its trials and tribulations.

[15] In this list I would include Alain Badiou, Quentin Meillassoux, Tristan Garcia, Graham Harman, Manuel DeLanda, Slavoj Zizek, Iain Hamilton Grant, Levi Bryant, Thomas Nail.

[16] See Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self. Penguin. 1990.

[17] See Ray Brassier interviewed by Marcin Rychter; https://xylem.aegean.gr/~modestos/mo.blog/i-am-a-nihilist-because-i-still-believe-in-truth/.

suggests that the *being* of an object (or concept) might need to be pointed at *indirectly* to gain its truth; using metaphor, allure, visual aids, etc. In Harman's own words:

> *While analytic philosophy takes pride in never suggesting more than it explicitly states, this procedure does no justice to a world where objects are always more than they literally state. Those who care only to generate arguments almost never generate objects. New objects, however, are the sole and sacred fruit of writers, thinkers, politicians, travellers, lovers, and inventors.*[18]

The reason I call the four speculative realists *continental philosophers* is that I see in their work, respectively, a re-negotiation of both the Kantian episteme that has dominated most of twentieth-century continental philosophy (for better or for worse in figures such as Heidegger and Deleuze) with a non-anthropocentric, post-phenomenological[19] and sometimes modern-scientific viewpoint on *contingency* and *the real*. I see in these four speculative realists a revision of the Kantian transcendental and a renegotiation of the function of finitude inherent in subjectivity, with that of the findings of contemporary mathematics, the ascending order of the infinite (or trans-finite) and the glaringly obvious de-centring of the subject as but one entity amongst a plethora of objects in the cosmos.

Now, in terms of these four domains (contingency/necessity, finitude/infinity, subjectivity/objectivity, and the real as transcendent or immanent), it is Hegel that holds the most cards (or artillery) regarding these concepts (they are in a sense Hegelian inventions). Furthermore, if we can tentatively agree that such domains require a form of thinking which is *beyond* that of the linguistic turn, *beyond* that of scientific positivism, *beyond* that of empiricism and beyond any correspondence theory of truth, then we can also add the more general method (or attitude) of *speculation* to this quadriptych and hence connect the *speculative* in speculative realism to the *speculative idealism* of Hegel.

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[18] Harman, Graham, On Vicarious Causation, Collapse Journal 2, 2007, Urbanomic Press, p. 212.

[19] I refrain from saying *non-phenomenoogical* because Harman's ontology does account for "intentional objects" in the "sensual realm" while Grant can be seen to naturalise phenomena away from the subject–object mode of instantiation central to Kantian and Hegelian philosophy.

In other words, the decision is not one between a kind of epistemological straightjacket of Kantian philosophy and a philosophy of language on the one hand, and a complementary brand of scientific realism on the other.[20] Rather, it is the more speculative journey of attempting to access noumenal interiority regarding the **withdrawn** object (Harman), the 'great outdoors' afforded by **hyper-chaos** (Meillassoux), the pre-objective **dynamism** and **antecedence** of matter (Grant) and the non-phenomenological horizon of **extinction** (Brassier). All four of these speculative realists are searching for a *real* that is unconventional, non-commonsensical, 'weird', etc.; a real that challenges the concepts of objectivity in analytic philosophy and modern science. In some cases, an *intellectual real* that pushes beyond the Kantian 'critical' coordinates of thinking and exerts a force that loosely resembles the great metaphysicians of the real and ideal in Plato, Descartes, Leibniz and, of course, Hegel. In brief, reality is not what it seems.

## Layout: Which Hegel/s?

These four terms (the withdrawn, hyper-chaos, dynamism and extinction) will be so important to us regarding our speculative formulations of the real. They will each be elaborated upon in this book; **Graham Harman**'s 'withdrawn' object-oriented ontology will coax many of Hegel's insights into the realism of the object. As Hegel states in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*:

> (T)he object is: it is what is true, or it is the essence. It is, regardless of whether it is known or not: and it remains, even if it is not known, whereas there is no knowledge if the object is not there.[21]

We will analyse some of the possible ways in which the object refuses to be 'sublated' by human cognitive experience (or what Hegel

[20] Something that analytical philosophy occupies itself with in many ways; tweaking the subjective realm with linguistic fastidiousness and the objective realm with a 'logical empiricism/positivism' bent on the exclusive objectivity of scientific knowledge.

[21] Hegel. G.W.F. The Phenomenology of Spirit, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 59.

sometimes called 'determinate Notions'). We will also take a foray into a very controversial aspect of Hegel's philosophy; his *philosophy of nature* and analyse the putatively self-organised *Ideas* of nature that Hegel most commonly associated with 'natural kinds' and see how this fares with Harman's definition of objects.

Other than 'natural kinds', we will also find the many pre-human characterisations of contradiction, sublation and negation found already in Hegel's more broader objects of nature (presumably influenced by Hegel's Aristotelianism).

We will then shift our focus, from a theory of *Geist* as that which inheres in either *Nature* or *everything that is* (Spirit)—depending on your inclination to define *substance*—to a theory of *Geist* linked exclusively to *mind*; the rational, normative and ostensibly absolute[22] language in which all human action is oriented. Nevertheless, **Ray Brassier**'s interest in the '*in-itself' of the 'for us'* (i.e. non-phenomenal consciousness) suggests that Hegelian self-consciousness (hereby rearticulated as 'determinate negation') has *not* been successfully exhausted by either a folk psychological model synonymous with the first-person phenomenological perspective, nor any form of eliminativism synonymous with scientific realism. Brassier will then go on to develop this thesis and claim that there is an alternative route beyond both phenomenological and scientific discourses; there appears a 'will-to-know' which is

> driven by the traumatic reality of extinction, and strives to become equal to the trauma of the in-itself whose trace it bears. This binding "coincides with the objectification of thinking understood as the adequation without correspondence between the objective reality of extinction and the subjective knowledge of the trauma to which it gives rise".[23]

This section will look at Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*[24] as a non-eliminativist (and just as importantly), a non-*subjective* idealist

[22] According to Robert Pippin, geist is the absolute totality of norms according to which we can justify our beliefs and actions. See Pippin, Robert, Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness. Cambridge University Press, 1989.

[23] Brassier, Ray, Nihil Unbound, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

[24] Hegel, G.W.F. Phenomenology of Spirit. Oxford University Press. 1977.

phenomenological approach to consciousness; as logical, rational, historical and social. To clarify, Hegel's phenomenology is subjective in the sense that subjects activate and possess many of the instruments required for a properly dialectical analysis to ensue ("substance as subject"), yet it is *asubjective* in the sense that consciousness never catches up with itself, is never identified with the immediately 'given', and is not produced through the whims of solipsistic egos. In J.N. Findlay's words:

> Hegel as a thinker may have been born in the dark forests of German subjectivism, but by the turn of the century he had advanced, we may say, into Attic sunlight, the Idea, with its impersonal Hellenism, having taken over the functions of the Transcendental Ego or other forms of involuted Germanic interior self.[25]

**Quentin Meillassoux** reaches a radically non-phenomenological conclusion regarding the *real*; he asserts a *hyper-chaos* which objectifies human 'givenness' (or manifestation) as a specifically correlated *human time* that post-dates both the *ancestral* time of a non-transcendental existence *and* the *absolute* time of a *radical contingency* which does away with the principle of sufficient reason. This argument is synonymous with the empirical/sceptical denial of causality as having any rational/sufficient grounds, which is reframed through a radical rearticulation of Hume's 'problem of induction'. However, as fellow speculative realist Iain Hamilton Grant has acknowledged, "Meillassoux's denial of the principle of sufficient reason is in fact expressly designed to satisfy it, albeit paradoxically".[26] The question here is whether the *necessity of* the necessity of contingency acts as a placeholder for this sufficient reason, or whether this contingency does away with any possible ground of sufficiency, as one is not replacing one theory with another but replacing the very *laws* under which those sufficient (or revisable) theories take place. Regarding Hegel, as I have argued elsewhere,[27] even if we assert that the actual

[25] Findlay, J.N. Ascent to the Absolute, Towards a Neo-Neo-Platonism, p. 247, 2019 edition, Routledge.

[26] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Does Nature Stay What-it-is?: Dynamics and the Antecedence Criterion, *The Speculative Turn*, 2011, p. 67.

[27] See *Iterations of the Absolute* included in this book.

trajectory of Spirit occurs as a unique spatio-temporal, conceptual and material *singularity*,[28] we must add the caveat that this *unrepeatable* sequence *unfolds logically*—as one instance discloses what is explicit in its previous implicit nature. In other words "Hegel does not confuse a necessary sequence of phases with the *only* possible sequence that can be taken".[29] This *retroactive* mobilisation of necessity will appear crucial in our chapter on Meillassoux and Hegel, as will their separate accounts of contradiction (Hegel) and non-contradiction (Meillassoux). This chapter will take resources from Hegel's *Science of Logic*,[30] especially the sections entitled *Unity of Being and Nothing* and *Contingency, or Formal Actuality, Possibility and Necessity*.

Regarding **Iain Hamilton Grant**, we could say that his thesis acts as a critique of all three previous speculative realists, accusing them of a certain "physiocide". For example, Grant may wish to ask Brassier *where* exactly his claims of absolute extinction come from, with the corrective that they are made *in nature* and hence are internal to natural phenomena. Likewise, Grant may wish to ask whether Meillassoux's radical contingency can really account for the emergence of thought as an aleatoric, spontaneous event (similar to Meillassoux's claim that a God may someday exist in the radical virtuality of the future), as opposed to formulating thoughts' emergence in nature as a *continuation* of natural phenomena. Regarding Harman, Grant may accuse the object-oriented ontologist of *denaturalising* the object into a set of eternally actual and quasi-autonomous conditions (devoid of its complicity with natural anteriority or dependency) and of denaturalising the object into a solipsistic object-generated form of prehension (or "polypsychism") as opposed to the more monistic processes of *ideation* Grant finds in Schelling's

[28] See J.N. Findlay's passage in his foreword to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. vi. "There is no reason then to think that Hegel thought that the path traced in the *Phenomenology*, though consisting throughout of necessary steps, was the only path that … could have been taken in rising from sensuous immediacy to absolute knowledge. It was the path that *had* been taken by the World Spirit in past history … but this involved no pronouncement as to what pathway to Science would be taken by men in the future, nor as to what pathway would have been taken in other thinkable world-situations. For Hegel admits an element of the sheerly contingent, and therefore also of the sheerly possible, in nature and history."

[29] Ibid., p. vi.

[30] Hegel, G.W.F. The Science of Logic. Cambridge University Press. 2015.

*transcendental naturalism*.[31] This section will take into account Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* found in part two of *The Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*,[32] especially *The Notion of Nature* and his musings on space and time in section one entitled *Mechanics*.

## Hegel's Speculative Correlationism: Being and Non-Being

The work of all four speculative realists will be investigated and presented here, all with one eye on Hegel's own answers to the speculative realist quandary of *correlationism* and the search for both the *absolute* (ideation for Hegel) and the '*in-itself*' (contradiction for Hegel). One of Hegel's contributions to the legacy of the post-Kantian *real* is to formulate the inextricable intertwining of Being and Thought as *non-identical* (or non-self-identical). Thought connects to Being as it *negates* the *groundlessness* of Being *as the Being of* thought (more aptly the *Becoming of* thought). This conversion of the *failure* of thought (determinate negation) regarding Being, as itself the generation of the Being of Thought, designates both Being and Thought as essentially indeterminate and unknowable *in-themselves*. This thesis is not simply the assertion that Thought must possess Being similar to all other things that *participate in* Being, it is the assertion that Being *itself* is delayed (or buffered) due to the possible *understanding* (reflection or realisation) of itself *as* Being. In other words we have the productive dialectic between what Hegel will set up as the modal distinction between essence and actuality. However, once identity is restored to the 'substance' of Being, this very realisation—as a mode of *sublation*—must itself be accounted for *ad infinitum* (or, more aptly, *ad eternum*). This manoeuvre indeed places Hegel as the great master of the absolutisation of Thought with Being. *However*, whether we view this from the side of *Thinking* and state that Thought never accesses Pure

[31] See Grant, Iain Hamilton, Prospects for a post-Copernican dogmatism: On the antinomies of transcendental naturalism, Collapse 5:415–451 (2009).

[32] Hegel, G.W.F. Philosophy of Nature found in Part Two of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), Translated from Nicolin and Pöggeler's Edition (1959), and from the Zusätze in Michelet's Text (1847). Oxford University Press. 2004 edition.

Being but only *negates* Pure Being as it is simultaneously converted into a *Becoming of Thought* (an actual, determinate activity), or whether we view it from the side of *Pure Being*, which is constantly negotiated (in Hegel's initial triad of logical categories) by *Non-Being*, *neither Thought nor Being properly touch each other*. In fact, if one wishes to make Hegel the master correlationist of Thought and Being, they should integrate *Non-Being* into this scenario also. Being is too occupied with the Non-Being that it logically (dialectically) co-implicates for it to identify itself fully and presently *to* or *as Thought*. Thought, likewise, being an *actual* (and not virtual or abstract) *determinate activity* (or self-activity), mirrors the power of Non-Being more than it does Being; Thought subtracts *indeterminate* Pure Being into *determinate* instances of Becoming, and a Becoming is always *pulled* just as much by a nothingness (or Non-Being) which it exhausts itself through (like a slipstream) as it is *pushed* by a Being that gives Becoming the element of the *Being o*f Becoming.

Hegel's *vicarious* and *indirect* correlation of Being and Thought presents us with a novel rhetoric which can discern to what degree the four speculative realist's work *indirectly* relapses from time to time into a form of the correlationist circle. For example, the correlation between productivity and product vis-à-vis *Nature* in Grant, the necessity of registering the real through the sensual in Harman (*translation*), the suggestion that thought can think its extinction and hence can *pre-emptively register* the destruction of being in *thought,* or the claim that our very specific mathematical discourses can directly formalise the 'in-itself' of hyper-chaos putatively outside of any correlation. These could all be seen as indirect forms of correlation; whether as transcendental materialism, the centripetal unity of the reality of being and the sensuality of thinking *qua* "translation", the ostensibly "non-correlationist", rationalist access to a "non-dialectical identity" rendered possible by "the objectification of thought" qua extinction, and perhaps even the basic claim that the 'in-itself' can be correlated to mathematical number could be seen as even more *idealistic* than Hegel's *heuristic* characterisation of mathematics.[33]

[33] According to Hegel, mathematics is the science of quantity, that is, of a determination of objects which does not describe them as such, in what makes them specifically different from other objects and from themselves at another stage in their development, but only from the side that is external and indifferent towards change. See Ernst Kolman and Sonia Yanovskaya, *Hegel & Mathematics*. New Park Publications. 1983.

## Speculative Idealism and Speculative Realism

There are at least two dominant reasons why Hegel is being taken more and more seriously in the twenty-first century. One is his theory of consciousness as commensurate with the real, with the caveat that *the real is infinitely self-revisionary*. What this means is twofold: (1) that the real is immanent to the production and conditions of consciousness; (2) that the real must revise itself constantly; that the real comes into comprehension as a process (the owl of Minerva flies at dusk), and that such a comprehension reactivates what came before it as the new (or always) real. A common example used by Hegel himself is his theory of Nature *finding* its reality through producing subjects (or humans) that later come to comprehend this nature and give it coherence, unity, essence and the fusion of both its subjective and objective poles (what Hegel called "objective purpose"[34]). Hence, the reality-making (as criteria) comes after the fact of its 'ontic' existence, yet—in usual Hegelian fashion—we get a feeling that such recognition was simply a product of its own making (nature's own making; of humans) and hence no dualism or binary set of correspondences was really necessary in the last instance. This overcoming—of two productive terms into one—is called 'sublation' by Hegel, and its holism is generally equated to what he calls 'the absolute' or the dynamic process of 'the negation of the negation'. What is interesting in this regard is that Hegel is acting as *both* a *realist* (the world is changing and humans are part of that change) and an *idealist* (human thought is part of the real, and comprehension is sought 'in the last instance' as an adequate picture of reality). The subsequent strand of argumentation would then be whether 'the real' requires—and is contingent upon—consciousness as a process of universal comprehension/realisation, or whether a staunch commitment to the real must require a mind-independent realism.

The idea that *all of reality is inherently logical* allows Hegel to affirm the *pre-subjective reality of logical process* whilst allowing *human thought* to be

[34] For a beautiful rendition of this concept of 'objective purpose', see Willem DeVries, *Hegel and Mental Activity*, Cornell University Press. 1988.

a natural continuation and complexification of such logical processes. Yet this realism only triumphs if we are to accept the universalisation of logical "patterning" (just as Meillassoux accepts the universality of mathematical inscription). One could also argue that Hegel *absolutises* time and space by embedding them within what he calls "logical unfolding"; the universal sequential logic of dialectical movement; unfolding, sublation, negation, and the co-implication of the particular in the universal (and vice versa) or *part* and *whole*. But this won't cut it for Meillassoux's theory of an absolute time that has the ability to destroy its own succession, its laws, and the objects within it (and it might not cut it regarding *quantum* theorisations of time and space, nor *relativist* conceptions of time and space as a *malleable* continuum). One way of interconnecting the idea that *Geist* is specifically and autonomously *mind*, with the idea that *Geist* is *Spirit* (a self-activity which importantly participates in *all that is* and not solely mind) is—ironically—an idea that we can borrow from Graham Harman; "translation".[35] For example, similar to a certain Kantian perspective, we could propose that there is an activity intrinsic to us (and possibly all objects) that *converts* any degree of alterity and difference into an alterity and difference 'for us'. Such alterity and difference is thereby converted into a *structure* (the unity of apperception for Kant, the will-to-power for Nietzsche, neural networks for Churchland, language for some of those diehard followers of the linguistic turn, etc.). This structure is itself absolute in that it absolutely converts *any and every* possible difference and alterity into an autonomous "space of reasons" or into a necessary *sensual* intermediary space, etc. This absolute autonomy is only *relatively-absolute* however, because the unity of apperception is not exempt from *physical* (causal) destruction which *relatives* the absolute-object (such as the Kantian 'Subject') as but another arbitrary object amongst a plethora of other objects under the whim of external forces *relative* to its survival. Robert Pippin can be seen to utilise this *relative-absolute* aspect of Hegel's work. According to Pippin, "the Hegelian" Geist "should be understood as the totality of norms according to which we can justify our beliefs and actions. The important point is that we

[35] Harman's term 'translation' can be found spread across his entire corpus but for an example see *The Quadruple Object*, Zero Books, 2011.

cannot justify anything except in such a normative, logical space of reasons. So no kind of distinctively human rational cognition and action is articulable or intelligible independently of such norms".[36] It should be added that any shape of Spirit can still collapse under the pressure of internal or external forces, yet these external pressures are reinscribed *into the content of Spirit itself* and nowhere else. One might wish to argue—contrary to Meillassoux—that the contingency which *relativises* any *absolute* position into a state of *dependence*, is itself *turned into a necessity* by Hegel, because dependence turns into a necessary predicate of the object or a necessary condition for the object's existence.

Hegel is a philosopher of infinity, and although not all of the initial four speculative realists endorse infinity in an ontological sense,[37] infinity paves the way for a certain type of thinking about how necessity could arise through absolute contingency, or whether this statement is itself paradoxical. In other words, could contingency *have* necessity to it, could necessity be contingent, or could contingency be inherently necessary? We used to think that Hegel answered this once and for all, by describing not only the eternal conditions which gives Being necessary Becoming (his exposition of his triad of logical categories—Being, Non-Being and Becoming), but also his *immanentist* method which asserts that whatever occurs must necessarily take place for the present to be precisely as it is; this very same instant in which we question its sufficiency (hereby making necessity only *retrospectively* legitimate). However, through Hegel's *speculative* theory of the triad of logical categories, and the recent recognition of Graham Harman's more expansive object-oriented ontology which includes a host of astronomical entities that de-centre the traditional earth-based (*tellurian*) philosophies of Heidegger, Schelling, etc., we can now reinterpret Hegel twofold: (1) as a metaphysician who is specifically dealing with the *contingently necessary structure of earth* (as an absolute self-determining object); (2) as a *cosmological metaphysician* who leaves the Being, Becoming and Non-Being of other non-tellurian 'objects' open to an infinity of pluralistic, multiversal realities, all

[36] See Pippin, Robert, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

[37] Graham Harman endorses the finite horizon of each and every object, as a mode of that object's existence and as a barrier preventing its absolute knowledge or absolute transparency with itself.

pertaining to conditions outside of our own, that is, outside of the transcendental and outside of the phenomeno-*logical* (space and time as we experience, register and know it). These two opinions will of course be explicated in the following pages of this book.

It might also be worth adding that, one of the most dominant ways to think outside of the Kantian schema and the agnosticism that such ensues, is to disintegrate the phenomenal-noumenal distinction into a 'self-relating negativity'[38] which moves through various stages of identification (subjectively and objectively). The Hegelian method is to then map out the universal dialectic that bypasses subject–object distinctions and finite–infinite antinomies, which obeys a more *logical* genesis of space and time beyond that of the Kantian *subjective* transcendental account of time and space as prescribed through intuition, concepts and judgements. It is this type of non-Kantian *exteriority* which I believe haunts the original four contributors of the speculative realist movement. In other words, there is every reason to suggest that a real dialectical process could exist and complement the speculative realist concern with an outside; whether as pertaining to the existence of cosmological objects, or as pertaining to a nature that infinitely recedes from any specific location or present moment, or as pertaining to the way in which extinction occurs or is formalised, or as pertaining to a contingency which Meillassoux wishes to salvage as absolute.

On the surface, the fusing of Hegelianism and speculative realism seems contradictory; could there be a 'real' beyond that which is prescribed in the absolute as a "moving stage of consciousness", "substance becoming subject" or simply the "negation of the negation"? However, the term 'realism' didn't have its contradistinctive appeal in the nineteenth century (it was not commonly a theory pitted against idealism for example). There is undoubtedly 'speculation' in Hegel (we all know that by now), and a speculation which is legitimised as a proper part of ontological methodology. In Hegel, the *real* has not yet come to be fully realised; it requires time for a more unfolding historical logic to occur (the owl of Minerva flies at dusk), its process—of speculative movement, addition and advancement—too *quick* and supple for any conventional

[38] See Brassier, Ray, Presentation in Collapse III, Urbanomic, 2007, p. 309.

logic to track.[39] The *real* of dialectical structures always manifests 'in the last instance' or as a *whole* above and beyond its parts, and it is these inclinations that connect a form of speculative realism with Hegel's speculative metaphysics. I would also controversially argue that Hegel gives Meillassoux the tools to formulate his theory on the 'necessity of contingency' and the *necessary facticity of the finite* (what Hegel might call the 'concrete') but this will be elaborated upon later in the book.

Could we possibly answer both yes and no regarding the question of whether Hegel is a 'correlationist' in Meillassoux's terms? There is definitely a correlation regarding consciousness (specifically organistic, tellurian consciousness) and the conditions for such consciousness, which Hegel rightly designates as nature (or the earth). In other words, the absolute object earth produces objects which are correlated to it (just as eukaryotic cells can be found everywhere in organic life). However, as we have discussed, this leaves whatever is outside earth up for grabs; as other absolute objects (or real objects in the Harmanian sense) with their own specific conditions of possibility (which only appear commensurate to our own qua the sensual realm/the superimposition of the Kantian-transcendental). In this sense, Hegel secures the tellurian absolute by leaving its outside open to speculation and agnosticism (like Kant). How can we resolve this contradiction of multiple absolutes? In Harman's words:

> Objects must be conceived as *autonomous* individuals *not entirely disconnected* from their components, or from the other things against which they bitterly or happily strike. Yet it must also be seen that they are sealed off from one another.[40]

[39] J.N. Findlay describes Hegel's speculative dialectic as "in fact, a richer and more supple form of thought-advance than mathematical inference, for while the latter proceeds on lines of strict identity, educing only what is explicit or almost explicit in some thought-positions content, dialectic always makes higher-order comments upon its various thought-positions, stating relations that carry us far beyond their obvious content". Findlay, J.N. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel. G.W.F. Foreword. 1977; p. vi.

[40] Harman, Graham, *Aristotle with a Twist, Speculative Medievalisms*, Punctum, 2013; p. 238 (my italics).

Unlike Kant, however, we do have the theoretical tools to discern absolute objects and their conditions of possibility, as well as the logical formulation of other possible worlds (i.e. the infinite actualisation of absolute objects) through the speculative designation of Being, Non-Being, and Becoming in Hegel's triad of logical categories. It is *this* formulation—of an infinite possibility of actual Becoming's from the empty *logical* categories of Being and Non-Being, that gives Hegel a speculative air about him. Similar to Aristotle, this is a meta-physics that implies that "physis is only *one* mode of being".[41] In other words, Being may perhaps be able to (theoretically) situate the physical or material mode of being as only a *particular* within it; as one particular actualisation (or Becoming) of Being. It is this particular characterisation of Hegel which brings him much closer to someone like Meillassoux; the use of logical *contradiction* (Being/Non-Being) as opposed to *the principle of noncontradiction* to deduce the possible logic of worlds (plural) or the *infinite* (Hegel) *virtuality* (Meillassoux) of the categories Being and Non-Being and their hypotheses as actual, possible emerging realities *outside of our own correlation of Being and Non-Being* which we designate as one (material and conceptual) history of *World Spirit* (Hegel).

Hegel could also be called a speculative realist in another sense; although the earth is inherently reflective (and reflexive) regarding all of its parts (holism), human cognition and the practices of phenomenology or empiricism will *not access* the dynamic, logical trajectories of the dialectic; Ideas are far too large, too inter-objective (and inter-subjective) and cannot be reduced to any *present-at-hand* analysis (presencing). The speed of the dialectic is "in fact, a richer and more supple form of thought-advance than mathematical inference, for while the latter proceeds on lines of strict identity, educing only what is explicit or almost explicit in some thought-positions content, dialectic always makes higher-order comments upon its various thought-positions, stating relations that carry us far beyond their obvious content".[42] The question then is; how do we keep up with such thought-advancements, both serially (or

[41] "Nature is only a genus of Being"—Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1005a35, quoted in Grant, Iain Hamilton, 2011, p. 71.

[42] Findlay, J.N. The Phenomenology of Spirit. Hegel. G.W.F. Foreword. 1977, p. vi.

chronologically) and centrifugally (how the thoughts content necessarily integrates the *whole unity of its conditions as a universal particular*)? We must also ask ourselves, what is the distinction between presencing (or determination) as a form of *suspension* (i.e. the suspension between the finite and the infinite, and between Being and Non-Being, which is activated in experience), and the lack of any direct understanding in such a present instance (what Hegel had called "immediate" or "natural consciousness")? In other words, on the one hand, experience is given an *ideal* capacity (the temporalisation of eternity), yet on the other hand, most dialectical movements elude present experience and *unfold* beyond human cognition (at a great speed) and generate *Ideas* that elude basic analysis (are implicated in long historical trajectories or non-locatable instances[43]).

This pre-empts the crucial question: What formulation of the real are we intending here in relation to Hegel and Speculative Realism? It seems that we are saying quite a few things: (1) that the real is just as much beyond or behind (withdrawn from) the phenomenon (although commensurate with it) such as the excessive Idea which involves all of its past and future permutations which are irreducible to the present. This is not just a *spatial* problematisation of the real in the *Platonic* sense of formulating a realm of pure truths or forms in which particular objects or individual entities are merely "the multitudinous reflections or instantiations" of such forms and "are nothing in themselves at all",[44] it is also a *temporal* problem; the one that both Heidegger, Whitehead and Derrida have already shown us regarding *the critique of presence*; the reduction of *what is* to *what manifests* and is 'given' to us in experience. This process or temporal realism is also linked to the perseverance of *unity* in Hegel and Harman's work; as that which goes beyond partial experience, the partial profiling of the object. The whole (Hegel) or the unit (Harman) is deeper

[43] I think Hegel is one of the first philosophers to really gauge the depth of Ideas as possessing a historically influenced dimension. My reference to the non-locatable instances of any particular genesis of an Idea (or its non-reduction), is obviously influenced by Plato; as instances of universal 'Forms'. See J.N. Findlay's brilliant essay 'Towards a Neo-Neo-Platonism' in *Ascent to the Absolute*, Routledge, 2019 edition.

[44] Ibid., p. 251.

than the conjunction of surface phenomena and the effects of a specific object at any particular moment in time.

However, another real is touched upon here; (2) a *non-determination* which has just as much to do with the *noumenal* than it does with the 'withdrawn'. A non-determination that *resists* phenomena and relationality: What is beyond the sphere of our Becoming? What is not determined through the tension (contradiction) between Being and Non-Being? At what point does Non-Being encounter Being (and vice versa)? As I try to explicate in the first essay in this book on Graham Harman and Hegel, it is their novel inclusion of *both relationality and non-relationality* that gives both philosophers a sort of defiance towards any ontology that reduces reality to relations alone, or any non-relational ontology that remains content with eternally static objects or forms.

## Notable Research

Each chapter will start by addressing *which Hegel* I will be utilising in my analysis of the four respective speculative realists. As I have mentioned, it is the Hegel of *The Philosophy of Nature* that interests me regarding Harman's work, the Hegel of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* that interests me regarding Brassier's work, the Hegel of *The Science of Logic* that interests me regarding Meillasoux's work, and the Hegel of both *The Philosophy of Nature* and *The Science of Logic* regarding Grant's work. Concerning the four speculative realists, my research material veers towards Harman's book *The Quadruple Object*[45] and his very special essay *On Vicarious Causation*,[46] Brassier's book *Nihil Unbound*[47] and his lecture *On the Persistence of Form: Hegel & Psychoanalysis*,[48] Meillasoux's book *After Finitude*[49] and his essay *Potentiality and Virtuality*,[50] and Grant's book

[45] Harman, Graham, The Quadruple Object, Zer0 Books, 2011.

[46] Harman, Graham, On Vicarious Causation, Collapse Volume II, 171–206. 2012.

[47] Brassier, Ray, Nihil Unbound, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

[48] Presented at The University of Brighton on 20th January, 2017. Video link here; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9Qy50X5Gs8&t=8s.

[49] Meillassoux, Quentin, *After Finitude*, Continuum, 2007.

[50] Meillassoux, Quentin, Potentiality and Virtuality, *The Speculative Turn*, re.press, 2011.

*Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*[51] as well as the essay *Does Nature Stay What-it-is? Dynamics and the Antecedence Criterion*[52] and as his presentation *Speculations on Anonymous Materials*.[53]

It is probably worth mentioning that this is the first monograph to deal explicitly with the similarities and differences between Hegelian speculative or absolute idealism (sometimes called objective idealism) and speculative realism.[54] Yet what is more surprising is that there is very little research material comprising speculative realism *as a whole*. Peter Gratton's impressive *Speculative Realism: Problems and Prospects*[55] and Paul. J. Ennis's *Continental Realism*[56] assesses the influence speculative realism has had upon contemporary philosophy, yet it is very rare to find any volume on speculative realism that includes work on all four original contributors. For example, Leon Niemoczynski's *Speculative Realism: An Epitome*[57] leaves out the work of Graham Harman but engages with the other three members. Similarly, Anna Longo's essay *The Genesis of the Transcendental: How to make a Realist Speculation out of Absolute Idealism*[58] also leaves out Graham Harman's contribution to the field. This seems dangerously prejudiced, especially as Harman is considered the real progenitor of speculative realism as a cogent movement and still abides to its core principles today. Furthermore, if you really wish to talk about *entities* that extend beyond *Nature*, beyond the somewhat abstract characterisation of *hyper-chaos* and beyond an entities *effects* upon human cognition (such as Ray Brassier's philosophical

[51] Grant, Iain, Hamilton, *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling*, Continuum, 2008.

[52] Grant, Iain, Hamilton, Does Nature Stay What-it-is? Dynamics and the Antecedence Criterion, *The Speculative Turn*, re.press, 2011.

[53] Grant, Iain, Hamilton, Speculations on Anonymous Materials, Symposium: Saturday, January 4, 2014, Kassel, Germany. See video link here; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMoTh3HpO0E&t=171s.

[54] Although there have been some notable individual essays and books that deal with one of the four speculative realists and Hegel, such as Bart Zantvoort's *Hegel and Resistance: History, Politics and Dialectics* which deals with Meillassoux's work and Nathan Brown's *Rationalist Empiricism: A Theory of Speculative Critique* which also deals with a lot of Meillassoux's arguments.

[55] Gratton, Peter, *Speculative Realism: Problems and Prospects*, Bloomsbury, 2014.

[56] Ennis, Paul. J, *Continental Realism*, Zer0 Books, 2011.

[57] Niemoczynski, Leon, *Speculative Realism: An Epitome*, Kismet Press, 2017.

[58] https://www.academia.edu/19495907/The_Genesis_of_the_Transcendental_How_to_Make_a_Realist_Speculation_out_of_Absolut_Idealism.

characterisation of *extinction*), then one really only has the resources of object-oriented ontology to analyse such; to discern the *real qualities* of foreign objects not pertaining to the epistemological staples of physics or the Kantian 'conditions of possibility'.

## Additional Essays

Hegel is simultaneously the most ingenious and delusional philosopher since Plato. His theory of an anti-foundationalist, self-determining ontology still harbours novel implications for philosophy today; that reality arises as simultaneous with its object. This object is what I take the liberty of designating as *earth*. However, the 'object' (of Being) that thought thinks, simultaneously becomes divided as it is thought. It is thought that propels the groundlessness of Being into a determinate direction and simultaneously generates a productive gap between essence and actuality (i.e. what constitutes thought and how thought grasps this constitution *through its own content*). Hence, we must *redefine* the 'object' to include its own negative, divided and contradictory aspects (what Harman has called object-tensions) if we are to fully understand how this generation of thought with being occurs. In other words, we are arguing that *thought does not think absolute being* but rather thinks the specific spatio-temporal singularity of a Becoming. It is this Becoming which ostensibly expresses logical, rational unfolding (the dialectic, sublation, reconciliation, etc.), which is ensconced within a tellurian spatio-temporality as *the Idea encountering its other* (i.e. as the Idea encountering Nature). In a sense, Hegel is hereby logicising Nature; suggesting that it is the dialectical relationship between Idea and Nature—or internality and externality—that creates our coherent spatio-temporal, concrete rational conditions of existence and our subsequent path to absolute self-realisation of the Idea.

Yet my controversial argument is that the Idea is *not* the dialectical opposite of Nature or externality. The Hegelian *Idea* is in fact co-implicated within a specific earthly (tellurian) space-time, a space-time not universally applicable to every corner of the actual (or virtual/emerging) universe/multiverse. There is no grasping of absolute Being because Being takes on many dimensions that elude the spatio-temporal

conditions of thought. There is only an *absolute correlation* of essence and actuality, which, in this instance, is the correlation between the spatio-temporal (and subsequently bio-logical, chemical, physical) conditions of earth and its products (such as bodies and thoughts). This means that a specific correlation remains (an object-oriented—or hyper-object-oriented—correlation), whilst the search for other activations of Being remains incomplete and is a thoroughly speculative and uncharted enterprise.

The somewhat delusional aspect of Hegel's philosophy is his anthropocentric claim that humans are the epitome of rational self-determination (or freedom), which not only confines ontology to the rational but confines the rational to the human. Take this commentary on Hegel for example:

> Human beings, for Hegel, are thus not just accidents of nature; they are reason itself—the reason inherent in nature—that has come to life and come to consciousness of itself. Beyond human beings (or other finite rational beings that might exist on other planets), there is no self-conscious reason in Hegel's universe.[59]

Not only is this correlationist in leaning, it also attempts to subsume (or sublate?) the conditions of existence with human thought. But this wouldn't be so bad if we were told that other realities, other objects, other planets and other conditions could exist outside of this earthly correlation. This is where Hegel's *realism* comes in; (1) the awareness of co-constituting conditions of reality; that the *absolute idea* may be a *singularity* similar to something like the big bang theory (in-fact, some have already made this analogy[60]). (2) the awareness that human thought is embedded in a specific correlation—that of the *tellurian* space and time presented as Hegelian logical, dialectical becoming, therefore provoking the further possibility that objects constitute their own absolute times (their own "translation" of temporality). This theory, in part, supports the Einsteinian theory that it is an object's mass which determines

[59] https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel-aesthetics/.

[60] Reid, Jeffrey, Hegel and The Big Bang. See https://philarchive.org/rec/REIHAT-7.

an object's gravitational pull, and it is the object's gravitational pull that determines (or "warps") the specific space-time implicated in and around that object.

This is what my two most recent essays attempt to explore; the decentring of Hegel's absolute *world spirit* into a myriad of *relative-absolute* forms in the spirit of both *Harman's* object-oriented ontology (autonomous objects can exist side-by-side without ever encountering one another) and *Meillassoux's* formulation of *virtuality* as that which insinuates the radical novelty of the coming-into-existence of new objects with radically different laws and conditions of possibility than that of our own. I link this to the radical virtuality found in Hegel's account of the infinite possible actualisations of the infinite (in-itself) capacity of Being and Non-Being (as multiversal?) and attempt to stretch Einstein's infinite space-time curvature into radically new spatio-temporal coordinates that have no equivalence with our own. This in turn discredits Kant's transcendental *a priori* constitution of space and time as subjective inner and outer forms of intuition and also rearticulates Hegel's absolute space-time (of the dialectic) as a tellurian form of space- time determined by the object (earths) relative-absolute conditions of possibility. I will also introduce readers to my recent research on the absolute co-implication of internality and externality (i.e. no one without the other),[61] which I believe complements Harman's object-oriented ontology (the cosmos is made up of objects with interiors and exteriors *and nothing else*). In Timothy Morton's words, there is no other "'outside'—just the entire universe of entities constantly interacting, and you are one of them".[62]

Perhaps then, Hegel's account of the human being as the intrinsic zenith of reason merely describes *a particular form of reason*; a naturalistic form of reason absolutely commensurate with its conditions (earth). Perhaps this is the only reason in the universe, or at least a unique and autonomous (absolute) reason specific to its internal conditions (as an object). In other words, Hegel tracks the almost *tautological* process of a

[61] I will also try to integrate Harman's ontology into the dialectical antagonisms of Hegel's syllogistic logic of opposites (not just internal and external) leading to the eventual identity of difference (or the valorisation of the process of "translating" (sublation) over what is being translated).

[62] Morton, Timothy, Morgan Meis, Timothy Morton's Hyper-Pandemic, The New Yorker, June 8th, 2021.

history of prenatal rationality (pre-human logical entailment found in tellurian space and time) catching up with itself and eliminating what now appears trivial to its victory (or destiny), allowing only the logical entailments of human thought to remain as Spirit's prized possession.

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# 2

# Graham Harman: Politics of the Absolute

*Spirit converts nature intoanobject confronting it, reflects upon it, takes back the externality of nature into its own inwardness, idealises nature and thus in the object becomes for itself. But this first being-for-self of spirit is itself still immediate, abstract, not absolute; the self-externality of spirit is not absolutely overcome by it. The awakening spirit does not yet discern here its unity with the spirit concealed and implicit in nature, to which it stands, therefore, in an external relation.*[1]

## Which Hegel?

Regarding the analysis of the object, there are several places to look for just this in Hegel's oeuvre. In the now-famous chapter of *The Phenomenology*,[2] entitled *Sense-Certainty: Or the 'This' and 'Meaning*, Hegel immediately sets up the two 'Thises': one 'This' as 'I' and the other 'This' as 'object'.[3] Before we get clear on the relationship between these two 'Thises' (mutually and respectively), Hegel states:

[1] DeVries, Willem, Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity, Cornell University Press, 1988, p. 50.
[2] I will be using this shorter version from now on to refer to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.
[3] Hegel. G.W.F. The Phenomenology of Spirit, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 59.

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C. W. Johns, *Hegel and Speculative Realism*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-32657-8_2

> The object *is*: it is what is true, or it is the essence. It is, regardless of whether it is known or not: and it remains, even if it is not known, whereas there is no knowledge if the object is not there.[4]

This *realist* take on the object ("whether it is known or not") deserves more attention. For example, how is this mind-independent reality *of the object* reconciled with consciousness as both possessing dialectical features? Throughout *The Phenomenology*, we see claims to a "general self-sameness" where "the cognitive side and the things themselves remain selfsame",[5] but we also find (without contradicting this initial thesis) distinctions in what is *necessary* and what is merely *contingent* in the object, suggesting an upper hand regarding the designation of *human consciousness*, Notions (determinations) upon the object. For example, in *The Phenomenology* Hegel suggests that most of nature does not get beyond the idea of a "great influence";[6] it cannot determine itself, and, just as importantly, it cannot find 'the whole' present in it because "it is not *qua* whole for *itself*".[7] In other words, there is another criteria of the object for Hegel that is not one of *correspondence* in the usual empirical sense but one of *necessity* in the idealist/Platonic sense. But this is a strange, new necessity in the history of philosophy, the necessity of the sequence of negation in any application of the dialectic. Hence, we find that "any object must pass into its opposite", and—along with Graham Harman—Hegel suggests that the form or content is necessarily "withdrawn"[8] from the object because there appears a *contradiction*, between "a multitude of detached necessities" and the "unity of self-consciousness in general".[9] Although Hegel and Harman define this *tension* in different ways (this tension is famously overcome in Hegelian philosophy through a series of dialectical manoeuvres), both mobilise *deeper unities* of the object, whether as a non-relational *real object* (Heidegger/Harman) or as the differing, dialectical stages an object must undergo in order to reflect its universal element (Hegel). Whilst Harman is influenced by the

[4] Ibid., p. 59.
[5] Ibid., p. 150.
[6] Ibid., 179.
[7] Ibid., 179.
[8] Hegel uses this exact word—p. 181. Ibid.
[9] Ibid., 181.

Heideggerean notion of *actuality* as *present-at-hand* (as theoretical *reduction*), Hegel designates actuality as the suspension of logical possibility into a real and ideal unity (the *concrete*) which extends Kant's 'unity of apperception' to apply to the activation of reality itself *in the last instance*.

While the autonomy of self-consciousness—as a *truth*—is a fascinating and necessary element of Hegel's system, we will be looking more at the *actual determinations* Spirit takes regarding its instantiation in the physical and natural *as objects*. This will include an in-depth look at the various processes of what Hegel called "sublation", the various ways in which Spirit (or the Idea) is "exhibited"[10] (but not exhausted) by various 'self-determining' mammals, organisms and natural objects, and also the various differences between form and content, which implies a movement of translation between the two that I believe should not be circumscribed to human consciousness/Notions alone but rather is free to insert itself into the larger dialectic of world spirit, that all-encompassing process that Willem DeVries describes wonderfully:

> Spirit is thought to be a pure, self-generating activity. Rather than being thought of as a particular kind of thing with specific properties and interactions with other things, spirit has to be thought of as a particular pattern of activity, a special kind of organisation which interactions among things can exhibit. Spirit cannot be adequately grasped through categories or concepts abstracted from finite things, much less from sensible things, because it is not a thing or even like a thing. And "spirit" has a much broader use than "soul," for it denotes the underlying activity informing and accounting for not only the mental activity of the individual but also social and historical activity.[11]

## Which Harman?

Although there was little room to infiltrate Harman's metaphysics into the purely logical investigations in *The Encyclopaedia*,[12] there was space for an analysis of the internal/external movement of necessity and contingency in the realm of the mechanical/physical, chemical and teleological

[10] Willem DeVries, Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity, Cornell University, 1988, p. 25.
[11] Willem DeVries, Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity, Cornell University, 1988, p. 25.
[12] Encyclopaedia of Logic.

through Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* and how this may tentatively relate to the *molten core* of the real object in Harman and the subsequent external relations that the object cannot be reduced to or exhausted by. This seemingly relates to Hegel's theories on the internal 'design' or 'Idea' of the object (or 'thing') and the distinction between self-determination and contingent determination regarding internal and external relations.

I would also like to add that, other than close readings of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, *The Philosophy of Nature* and his *Encyclopaedia of Logic*, I am indebted to J.N. Findlay's collection of essays entitled *Ascent to the Absolute*, which argues for an Aristotelian reading of Hegel, where "teleology has been carried to the limit, so that it becomes transformed into something else".[13] Findlay's description of Hegel's dialectic, as "a method of persistently reapplied higher-level, or metalogical, or second-order comment, in which we pass from a situation where we merely employ a concept to a situation where we consider the content and operation from *outside* as it were, and assess its success in doing whatever it sets out to do", helped me a lot in situating the perpetual, *vicarious* productions of object, form and content in Harman's object-oriented metaphysics in conjunction with Hegel's absolute idealism. Findlay's alternative, complementary description of the dialectic as "a method where we use such metalogical thought-transitions to understand a series of strata or layers of being in the world, or a succession of phases in personal biography or in world-history",[14] also allowed me to situate alterity and difference within actual, immanent *objects*, an actualised world within a specific actualised history (in Findlay's words—a "fine blend of the contingently historical and the logically necessary").[15] My interest regarding Harman here is whether we can designate his theory of "translation" as a *logical unfolding* of sorts, as a *universal* and *necessary* operation concerning the 'sublation' of a real objects 'content' into the sensual confines of the adjacent object prehending (or encountering) such an object, and whether this operation can be said to occur ad infinitum and across the board (flat ontology). The Harmanian reading of Hegelian

[13] Ascent to the Absolute, J.N. Findlay. Routledge 1970.

[14] Ibid., p. 132.

[15] Findlay. J.N. Foreword to The Phenomenology of Spirit, Oxford University Press, 1977. p. vii.

'contingency' might then be defined as the "accidental qualities" and inessential adumbrations that the object's sincere "translation" does not register (instead, we have something like Hegel's predeterminate theory of the object's *implicit* 'content' unfolding as *explicit* content). However, this notion of 'content' may be accused of "overmining" the object into a set of knowable traits commensurate with human phenomenal knowledge. Yet we must also add the caveat that, if Hegel converts contingency into necessity by making the former a predicate (i.e. a necessary feature of the object), then could we say that all contingency and difference/alterity in Harmanian ontology is similarly prehended/translated *sensually* as some form of *intentional* content? Before we try and answer this, I wish to briefly comment on the status of what I have called the *paradoxical-absolute* in speculative realism, as a sort of strange renaissance of the absolute in contemporary metaphysical discourse.

## Introduction

Within the last fifteen years there has been somewhat of a mini-renaissance of the philosophical concept of *the absolute* found not only in Quentin Meillassoux's 2008 work *After Finitude*[16] but also in the Speculative Realism movement in general.[17] In this chapter, I will start by briefly describing the various mutations of this absolute in contemporary philosophy. I will then suggest some political implications associated with these notions of the absolute and then move onto an analysis of the absolute 'whole' (Hegel et al.) and the absolute (non-relative) independence of the discrete unit or individual object in the work of Graham Harman.

The general presuppositions and first principles that are formulated regarding the possible existence of an absolute *has been* a philosophical discourse of yesteryear. That is until only recently, when speculative materialist Quentin Meillassoux openly advocated a thinking of the absolute

[16] Meillassoux, Quentin, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Continuum (reprint 2009).

[17] Inaugurated in 2007 at a conference at Goldsmiths College, London, England.

in terms of 'an absolute necessity of contingency'[18] and an absolute 'great outdoors' regarding an escape from what he terms 'correlationism' (and 'subjectalism', respectively). There is an almost paradoxical flavour regarding this position, and it should be further analysed;[19] if one instantiates an absolute knowledge which is at the same time *indifferent* to the human subject (mind-independent realism), then how can this even be deemed 'knowledge' in any normative sense as it does not refer to the history of knowledge we have formulated, such as a human 'space of reasons',[20] evolutionary knowledge or knowledge as 'transcendentally' guaranteed (Kant/Hegel)? If this knowledge becomes untethered to us (absolutely) then—without sounding overtly philanthropic—how can this help us? In Meillassoux's project, it seems that we are left 'knowing' only the 'facticity' of a thing (that it 'is') and that this facticity is mathematically formalisable/formulatable, yet the realm of phenomenological description, moral and teleological considerations or a priori necessity has nothing to do with this 'realist' fact and can only be subsequently offered as broken idols which comfort us in a time of disappointment or denial; *we have nothing to do with knowledge*.[21]

In fact, the 'speculative realist' movement in general has a plethora of implicit references to (what the twentieth-century continental tradition had disregarded as the 'dogma' of) the absolute, such as Ray Brassier's affirmation of the power of truth[22] and rationality against the auspices of relativism and Iain Hamilton Grant's interest in Schelling's absolute metaphysics of nature. However, it is Graham Harman's characterisation of the 'object'—as a non-relational entity or unity—that will interest us in this chapter, precisely because it signals a turn from the absolute (non-relative), autonomous 'whole' (Hegel) to the absolute autonomous

[18] Meillassoux, Quentin, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Continuum (reprint 2009). p. 34.

[19] How can one reconcile absolute knowledge with human thought (or 'intellectual intuition') when the absolute is in excess of the human?

[20] A pragmatist theory of meaning (Sellars etc.).

[21] For instance, knowledge is not *co-constituted* through the standard, phenomenological methods of subject-object found in both Kant and later Hegel. Neither is it a property of subjective ideation, mind or metal context (Berkeley), nor the demarcation of various linguistic instantiations.

[22] Ray Brassier states, "I am a nihilist because I still believe in truth", in an online interview here; https://xylem.aegean.gr/~modestos/mo.blog/i-am-a-nihilist-because-i-still-believe-in-truth/.

independence of the individual *object* (or possibly even the 'in-itself' of the object). Considering the regular, inextricable intertwining of politics and philosophy, we will assume that this shift in contemporary philosophical readings of the absolute seeps into the collective unconscious, subconscious and conscious (intentional) activities of political theory and praxis. And, of course, such metaphysical formulations are not without political implications.

Considering the notion of a metaphysical absolute, Meillassoux reminds us that the absolutisation of Being only implies the absolutisation of thinking or knowledge when Being is turned into a *sufficient* ground, origin or trajectory (Hegel). For example, the sufficiency of ground is seen to connect to *the sufficiency of thinking this sufficient ground*. This type of rationale can be seen in Descartes *circular* arguments and is critiqued by Meillassoux in his book *After Finitude*.[23] Furthermore, and eerily echoing Hegel, the traditional (metaphysical) absolutisation of Being also falls short by excluding *possible-Beings* or *not-yet-Being* from its remit. While Meillassoux achieves integrating radical contingency into Being through a principle of noncontradiction (i.e. real possibility can only exist if its present inexistence does not presuppose its existence, as that would be a contradictory theory that suspends the identity of the object in both its Being and its non-Being dimensions), Hegel alternatively affirms the non-Being dimension of Being through an absolute correlation of Being and non-Being qua *Becoming*. Hence, identity is immanently and dialectically secured for Hegel through a notion of *contingency as necessary unfolding*, as opposed to making contingency that which could potentially destroy such necessary unfolding (the physical laws of nature for example).

That the contemporary absolute is now associated with the nonconceptual, with 'hyper-chaos', and the necessity of contingency (as well as being offered-up as a blanket term for any absolute 'blindspot', 'gap' or 'not-all' in Lacan and Zizek's work) shows us that we are some way off the trajectory of Hegel's absolute idealist axiom. But in speculative realism, a strange inversion appears; it seems that we can 'know' this *failure* of absolute knowledge (and the failure of its equation with identity). Meillassoux

[23] Meillassoux, Quentin, After Finitude, Bloomsbury, 2009.

can 'absolutely' know the 'unreason' driving the facticity of every'thing' (i.e. it is absolutely true that anything can change from one moment to the next; the abolition of the principle of sufficient reason). The culmination of this 'futile' absolute can be found in those passages where Meillassoux suggests access outside of the correlation of being and thought by acknowledging the absolute facticity of our own death (because the thought of our own death is at once terminated before death occurs, yet we can still somehow think it). Graham Harman can also be seen to participate in this inversion of *absolute non-knowing* by suggesting that there is indeed a 'real object' or 'essence' *behind* the encyclopaedia of everyday objects we utilise as dasein ('being-in-the-world)', however, it is our *non-knowledge* of such (or indirect access/allure of it) which we must uphold instead of 'undermining' or 'overmining' the object into a set of knowable traits. This is what leads Terrence Blake and others to label Harman's philosophy as a 'negative theology".[24]

It seems that we are left at this crossroads in contemporary continental philosophy; if we wish to posit an absolute which is sophisticated and post-critical enough to endure, then we must set aside the possibility that *knowledge* can be tethered to this new, alien absolute. Yet the *positing of* such an absolute is paradoxically accessed through a *type* of thought (or where thought reaches its other, a resistance, a 'withdrawal') which *appears* to be a new manoeuvre beyond Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy.[25] Or, alternatively put, knowledge of the absolute is secured if we accept that what this knowledge is *of* cannot be converted into anything even vaguely resembling the principle of sufficient reason, transcendental (Kantian/Hegelian) identity, or some underlying self-identical substance/form. Meillassoux in fact makes the same point through his distinction between 'metaphysical' and 'speculative' thinking; the former is the argument for an absolutely necessary *entity* (God, Reason, Mind, Nature, 'World' etc.) and the latter the argument for the absolutely necessary

[24] See https://terenceblake.wordpress.com/2021/10/13/graham-harmans-the-third-table/ or https://itself.blog/2011/02/08/ooo-a-negative-theology-of-the-object/.

[25] Hegel's dialectical and antinomical thinking comes to mind here but instead of thoughts' 'other' or 'opposite' being *speculatively* 'reconciled' or 'sublated' by a supplementary mode of *identity*, we have a *speculative* form of philosophising which outstretches any *identity* capable of integrating thinking and being into a transparent relation that can account for itself *causa sui*.

*possibility* underpinning any one particular entity (or that an entity might *not* 'be' in alternative scenarios). In Meillassoux's own words, "we must uncover an absolute necessity that does not reinstate any form of absolutely necessary entity".[26] Harman manages to create a similar manoeuvre by reversing the *known-unknown* (Meillassoux's "Unreason") into an *unknown-known* by affirming the positive non-contradiction found in Kant's deduction of the existence of 'noumena' (or the 'in-itself') distinct from phenomena whilst simultaneously suggesting that we can never fully account for noumenal entities; the complicit form of sensual/phenomenal 'translation' that stymies any direct encounter with the noumenal is turned into a kind of universal science, epistemology and ontology by designating all 'objects' as possessing this primary strife between noumenal and phenomenal modes of existence. Hence, there *is* essence, there *is* an 'in-itself' (somewhat commensurate with Kant's thesis on noumena as non-contradictory), yet we could never prove such but only *imply* this known through what Harman terms 'metaphor', 'sincerity' and 'allure'.

## Objective

There are at least four convictions in the following contents of this chapter: (1) that a mini-renaissance of the absolute has begun and indeed is upon us, (2) that this 'new' speculative characterisation of the absolute, as *knowing an unknown* (Meillassoux) or *not knowing a known* (Harman) might be compatible with some strands of Hegelian dialectical thinking, (3) that the characterisation of the absolute as independent, non-relational unit (Harman) and that of the absolute as encompassing, relational 'whole' (Hegel, for example) has political consequences which have always existed as such antagonisms in the history of philosophy but may be more pertinent at present considering this renaissance of absolute (speculative) metaphysical thinking, and (4) that such polarising descriptions of the absolute may in fact be seen as *dialectically* formulated and hence less prone to the absolutisation of either side (i.e. leftism as

[26] Meillassoux, Quentin, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Continuum (reprint 2009). p. 34.

fundamentally open and relational, and rightism as fundamentally closed and consolidational).

This chapter will sketch out some lines of commonality between Graham Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) and G.W.F Hegel's theory of the (dialectical) object in his most accessible work *The Phenomenology of Spirit (The Phenomenology)*.

Hegel's metaphysics has a somewhat non-dualist character to it, a character that J.N. Findlay encapsulates in his foreword to *The Phenomenology* as a "concern always with the *Begriffe* or universal notional shapes that are evinced in fact and history, and with the ways in which *these* align themselves and lead on to one another, and can in fact ultimately be regarded as distinguishable facets of a single all-inclusive universal or concept".[27] This would seem miles away from Harman's metaphysical model for several reasons. Harman's model of 'real objects' (as opposed to 'sensual ones') cannot be absolutely and universally 'overmined' into a series of 'Notions' (however extra-phenomenal/logical these 'Notions' may be). The equation of the object with knowledge is but *one* way in which the irreducibility/inexhaustibility of the object is subsequently *translated* into a set of knowable traits, and this always follows a *reduction* of the object in some way or another for Harman. In the same way, a 'real object' cannot be reduced (or conflated) with the 'sensual object' or the many "swirling adumbrations" and "accidents" which Harman equates to the sensual "surface play" of objects, a surface of accidents that Hegel would designate as necessary and quasi-teleological (in that every objects "successive phases bring out what is logically implicit in its earlier phases"[28]). In other words, for Hegel, contingency—in and around the object—is always formulated retrospectively as a necessary aspect or condition of its existence, just as the many seemingly fortuitous moments of the French Revolution may appear as intrinsic to its main cause when studied after the fact, in history for example. This point also brings us to another contrast in both

[27] Findlay, J.N. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford University Press. Foreword to The Phenomenology, vii. 1977.

[28] Ibid., vii.

respective philosophies, that is, Harman equates *time* as sensual[29] (i.e. as a relational aspect of reality) which is not only counter to Hegel's crucial decision to claim that 'phenomenal time' ("the many moving shapes of consciousness") is intrinsically linked to the movement of logical operations (that logic is in fact expressed and even sublated qua *the phenomenal as its highest form*) but also counter to the intrinsic continuity between logical and phenomena-logical progression (or simply 'becoming').

However, it is the aim of this chapter to reveal some similarities between these two philosophers' initially incompatible views on reality. For example, does the notion of 'preservation' (or the movement from implicit to explicit knowledge) in Hegel's dialectic suggest something more radical than the historical and teleological position that 'everything is preserved as it undergoes sublation'? Does this notion of preservation not function on a more ontological basis, that a "unity of negation" or a "unity of contradiction" can be preserved beyond the phenomenal movements of knowing and experience? In other words, can we maintain a difference between 'object' and 'knowledge' which does not contradict the presupposition that absolute knowledge—to be absolute—must take along the object and subject with it simultaneously (as a mutual sublation)?

There are at least four ways of doing this with Hegel. For example, we can (1) emphasise Hegel's own *buffering* process between implicit and explicit knowledge, (2) emphasise the Hegelian notion of 'utility' in relation to the necessary reason why an object must remain an object somewhat independent of its knowledge, (3) allow the object to have a *contradictory* capacity ("essence as contradiction") which is hereby characterised as irreconcilable with human thought, and (4) distinguish between a fourfold of complementary yet distinct unities which are here seen as chronologically/historically constituted: Spirit, substance/object, subject, and unity of perception, which all avoid being conflated by the last unity (of perception) conventionally associated with absolute knowledge by Hegel.

[29] See Harman, G. (2016b) *Subspatial and Subtemporal*, in Amir, M. and Sela, R *Extraterritorialities in Occupied Worlds*. New York: Punctum Books.

## 1: The Buffering of Implicit to Explicit Knowledge

In Willem DeVries slim book entitled *Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity*, he describes Hegelian Spirit as follows:

> Spirit is thought to be a pure, self-generating activity. Rather than being thought of as a particular kind of thing with specific properties and interactions with other things, spirit has to be thought of as a particular pattern of activity, a special kind of organisation which interactions among things can exhibit. Spirit cannot be adequately grasped through categories or concepts abstracted from finite things, much less from sensible things, because it is not a thing or even like a thing.[30]

Regarding what Hegel describes as the movement from implicit to explicit knowledge (or content), there appears to be the possibility of both a non-anthropocentric and anthropocentric reading of Geist (Spirit), especially if we consider—as does DeVries—Spirit as not exclusively mental. In one sense we have a sort of topology whereby this "self-generating activity" of Spirit simultaneously actualises and organises objects. It is this 'doubling'[31]—of existing as a *particular determination*—and of existing as an element subsequently *organised into a whole* (even perhaps a *moving* whole), that acts as Spirit's own immanent mechanism in which it gauges both particular and whole in its own transcendentally constituted (albeit quasi-pantheistic) manner. If we are to affirm a theory of inhuman logical progression, with some form of collective prehension (Whitehead/Harman) or autopoietic nature, then it is precisely this—between the implicit and quasi-contingent embodiment of the becoming of nature on the one hand, and the subsequent self-arrangement of explicit, quasi-necessary *particulars* into *kinds* through object-object means or through some underlying ideational animism, cause, or purpose.

This already allows us to judge—albeit in a kind of process-philosophical way—a distinction or buffering between the self-movement of implicit to

[30] DeVries, Willem, *Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity*, Cornell University Press, 1988.

[31] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 17.

explicit reality and even reminds us of Harman's polypsychism, which is that an object's capacity for prehension depends on what relations it comes into contact with (relations of organisation, synthesis, sublation etc.). It also presupposes that the movement from implicit to explicit content is a capacity *exhibited in the object* (Spirit as an *initially* mind-independent activity) with the caveat that the object only "exhibits" this activity (cannot be reducible to it), as well as process philosophy suggesting to us that no implicit content is *ever fully* made explicit (there is no final identity where this movement stops or is terminated). Regarding Hegel, there is much argument as to whether there is indeed a final stage to realities realistion (the Idea, or the fulfilment of an Absolute Science) or whether, as J.N. Findlay states, there is "no pronouncement as to what pathway to Science would be taken by men of the future, nor as to what pathway to Science would be taken in other thinkable world-situations".[32]

Regarding the object, this movement of Spirit would seem to suggest that an object can *preserve* some of its earlier stages and 'lower' formations ('sub'-lation) whilst other determinations may ensue. Even the Hegelian notion of the essential *contradiction of the object*—which we will look at in depth in Part 3—suggests that the objects 'identity' is still *oscillating* between this movement, from implicit to explicit (or from the immanent determination of the particular, to its transcendental reorganisation into a universality, whereby the *object expresses the whole* and not merely "the great influence" of external contingencies that Hegel pejoratively finds initially in Nature).

Regarding process philosophy, this movement from implicit to explicit in Hegel runs even deeper in his initial analysis of Being and Non-Being in the *Science of Logic*.[33] In a section entitled *The Opposition of Being and Nothing in Ordinary Thinking*, the Being of Spirit is already a form of *determination* which requires Non-Being (or Nothing), for "in non-being the relation to being is contained: both being and its negation are

[32] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. vi.

[33] Becoming Remark 1: The Opposition of Being and Nothing in Ordinary Thinking. *Science of Logic*.

enunciated in a single term … as it is in *becoming*".[34] Even if one does not wish to permit this rhetoric, one should still try to use dialectical notions to break Being out of its self-identical tautology. To try and situate Being *in that which it is not* seems to hold more potential and scope philosophically, just as situating hot in relation to cold, or birth in relation to death and so on. In J.N. Findlay's words:

> (T)he breakdown of a notion as achieving the opposite of what it claims to achieve, the above-mentioned passage from Being to Nothing is a good example. Pure Being is a would-be concrete notion, but it does nothing to substantiate its claim. What it sets before us, *an object that is and no more*, and which is without definite character, is also indistinguishable from the absence of an object which it claims to exclude.[35]

In other words, the ostensibly self-identical object is dealing—both subjectively and objectively (implicitly and explicitly qua concepts and less explicit sublations)—with its lack of identity, absence, non-being or nothingness. This *determination* of Being would seem to complement the notion that there is a difference between determination and determined (implicit and explicit) regarding both the object and its content and perhaps even between the real object and its subsequent sensual translation (Harman).

On the other hand, even if we designate this movement of implicit to explicit as strictly *subjective*, as the production of explicit Notions that correspond and exist within both mental and physical reality, Hegel is quick to remind us that "this substance, as Subject … is in truth actual only in so far as it is the movement of positing itself, or is the mediating of its self-othering with itself".[36] It is more specifically "the doubling which sets up opposition, and then again the negation of this indifferent diversity and of its antithesis (the immediate simplicity)".[37] Hegel continues: "only this *self-restoring* sameness, or this reflection in otherness within

[34] Ibid.

[35] Findlay, J.N. *Ascent to the Absolute*. Routledge. 2019 edition. p. 134.

[36] Hegel. G.W.F. The Phenomenology of Spirit, Oxford University Press, 1977, Preface, p. 10.

[37] Ibid., p. 10.

itself – not an *original* or *immediate* unity as such – is the True".[38] Not only is this 'self-restoration' a process vulnerable to buffering, it also requires that it take on *form* to be *actual*; one must follow the "whole of the developed form" for Spirit, Substance, Essence or consciousness to be "conceived and expressed as an actuality".[39] One almost forgets in Hegel's phenomenology that the subject is an object of knowledge itself and Hegel states that even "the individual certainly cannot by the nature of the case comprehend his own substance more easily".[40] Lastly, we must always remember that with Hegel we have an absolute *phenomenology* (an absolute intersubjectivity), and the intentionality directing us towards the 'outside' is *negative*. In Bart Zantvoort's words, "for Hegel, the existence of thinking is the being-outside-of-itself of the object as much as that of the subject".[41] This movement of otherness does not even allow the 'Subject' to be a *substantial identity* which can equate contingency with the necessity of a self-identical *mind*. In other words, this buffering is inherent to the act of ostensibly subjective thought and activity in the first place.

What seems to cause most controversy in Hegel's oeuvre is his argument for the *commensuration* of the subject-ive and object-ive in his objective idealism, and that both subjective and objective processes tend towards the highest form of (completed) reality which culminates in self-consciousness's appropriation (or assimilation) of substance as the 'for itself' of *Subjective* consciousness (or "substance as subject"). The entire history of sublations, the epic progression of the syllogism, has "had the patience to pass through these shapes over the long passage of time, and to take upon itself the enormous labour of world-history, in which it embodied in each shape as much of its entire content as that shape was capable of holding"[42] and since "all this has already been implicitly accomplished; the content is already the actuality reduced to a possibility, its immediacy overcome, and the embodied shape reduced to abbreviated,

[38] Ibid., p. 10.

[39] Ibid., p. 11.

[40] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 17.

[41] Zantvoort, Bart, *Hegel or Meillassoux: The necessity of contingency and the auto-stabilization of chaos* (forthcoming 2023).

[42] Ibid., p. 17.

simple determinations of thought",[43] then thought truly takes the reins and becomes the quintessence of the ever-complex structure (or criteria) of reality. In J.N. Findlay's words:

> (T)he thinking ego is …connected … with the category of categories used in the synthetic constitution of objects by the understanding, and, at the end of the Phenomenology, the conceptualization of all objects, and their subjection to universals, is not seen as different from the imposition on them of the form of self.[44]

However, note that, although reality itself is shifting towards the 'evolved', universal categories found in human consciousness, a cognitive and determinative mechanism which can organise many objects and concepts into an inter-relational and universal space, *the immediacy of reality (*or more aptly Nature*) lingers*. What is this *immediacy* that is entirely open to further sublations/Notions yet cannot be fully abolished as explicit content? In other words, what is this *raw material* that is commensurate with both objective recognition (sublation/syllogism) and subjective recognition (determinate 'Notions') yet is only ever *converted* through such circumstances and never formulated as anything other, independent or autonomous from this process?[45] In fact, it is in one sense preserved, as a *residue*, or as the dialectical opposite of what is not *overdetermined* into *content*.

Not only is there much reality untouched by explicit content (qua the unresolved process of Spirit and its own internal attempts to *resolve its nothingness as part of the identity of exhibited objects*), the question has only ever been *subsequently* to do with the reconciliation of *human* consciousness with world consciousness; before this, we must allow each organism and object to contribute and participate in what Hegel called "objective spirit" or "objective reality" (if you allow me such terms). J.N. Findlay implies this when he states, "(F)or Hegel, the spiritual, the ideal, the

[43] Ibid., p. 17.

[44] Findlay, J.N. Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Foreword. Oxford University Press, 1977, p. xi.

[45] But of course, Hegel would suggest that the "other" is immanently contributing to this process.

self-conscious which is the ultimate meaning of everything, does not lie at the beginnings of thought and being, but rather at their end".[46]

Before Hegel can move us through the varying sequences of his Phenomenology, he must *retrospectively* account for this "immediacy"[47] of being, this "alien other …which abstract reason does not yet contain"[48] before it has been colonised by the universality of consciousness reached in the full integration of all logical syllogisms.

Interestingly enough, regarding Harman's philosophy, we have an inverse interpretation: while Hegel sees only "unthinking" observation of "tasting, smelling, feeling, hearing and seeing"[49] in the initial Nature that man is observing (as its 'bare immediacy'), what Harman would initially separate from this primary human relation would be the 'real object' itself. In other words, where Hegel's 'Nature' independent of mind is a realm of incomplete *sensuousness* (for the very reason that Hegel insists that mind must be integrated into Nature as its complete realisation), Harman would comfortably place a menagerie of various real objects (as well as their subsequent object-object sensual interactions might I add) as existing and subsisting beyond Hegel's immediate realm. Yet Hegel does not denounce any realism of mind independent objects as we soon come to realise in his now-famous chapter in *The Phenomenology* entitled *Sense-Certainty: Or the 'This' and 'Meaning*, in which he says:

> (T)he object is: it is what is true, or it is the essence. It is, regardless of whether it is known or not: and it remains, even if it is not known, whereas there is no knowledge if the object is not there.[50]

What is emerging in this account is the moment where determinate notions are ventriloquised (or assimilated) by the human rational subject, yet what is initially (or "immediately") given—in the analysis of Nature—are empty concepts and empty objects. But this does not disqualify the object from being "True" or" real", just that our understanding of natural

[46] Findlay, J.N. *Ascent to the Absolute*. Routledge. 2019 edition. p. 132.
[47] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 146.
[48] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 146.
[49] Ibid., p. 147.
[50] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 59.

objects—and the speculative enterprise of conceiving of objects as *understanding themselves* ('for itself')—has not been hitherto developed through human understanding as a progressive ingredient of universal understanding itself (consciousness as an objective science). There is a radical claim hidden behind this argument, which is not only that the logical development and self-reflexive nature of human thought bestowed upon us is the key to resolving the *absolute identity* of objects in nature (e.g. disclosing essence as contradiction) but also that this form of cognition *completes* or *enhances* the reality of such entities from the radical viewpoint of an objective reality which is trying to identify itself *through* human thought (human thought being a development of the universal progression of the syllogism that existed in a half-state before humans existed).

But it is worth emphasising here that the desired commensuration (or reconciliation)—between subject and object—in the act of knowing—does not abolish these two poles (these "two thises"), although both "move into their opposite".[51] Rather, subject and object are restored but as two determinations of the same Notion (absolute knowledge or identity). This allows Hegel (and subsequently us) to uphold a kind of dialectical movement whilst not advocating wholeheartedly a process philosophy which would put even subject and object under the whims of a boundless aperion or flux. There is a Hegelian dialectic here which *maintains* both the reality of object-object interactions (before definitive realisation and appropriation into the realm of universal Notions qua human cognition) and also the more traditional subject-object distinction, for the very same reason. We have explained this maintenance in terms of Hegel's buffered movement from implicit to explicit stages of realisation and how this links to the possibility of simultaneously upholding an object-oriented realism that is akin to Hegel's initial comments on the "true" object "regardless of whether it is known or not" whilst respecting the *explicitation* of the object (into determinate particulars and universals) as a knowledge of the object. The more ambitious question here is not only whether the *knowledge of* the object is *universally* valid (as a science) but whether such knowledge—emerging as real structures of

[51] Ibid.

ideation in reality—changes how the world identifies this object—giving knowledge a universal footing in a more ontological and speculative fashion. Regarding the maintenance of the distinction between subject and object (and implicit and explicit knowledge), there also exists a metaphysics of necessity and teleology, exemplified in Hegel's writings on *utility*, that defends this division.

## 2: Hegelian Utility

The notion of Hegelian utility is connected to our first numbered point regarding the movement from implicit to explicit, yet it argues that the *maintenance* of the distinction itself is an *absolute* one. For example, in J.N. Findlay's foreword to Hegel's phenomenology, he writes:

> The notional integration thus indicated ends, according to Hegel, in Absolute Knowledge or the Absolute Idea, the test of whose absoluteness consists simply in the fact that nothing further remains to be taken care of. Even the contingencies and looseness of connection that obtain in the world are such as the sort of system we are constructing does and must involve.[52]

In predictable Hegelian lingo, Findlay is saying that the surface contingencies, accidents and errors that necessarily distinguish objects from other objects and their environments, and the various "loosely connected" trajectories of determination that do or do not find themselves purposively integrated into a world, *are themselves necessary* upon reflection. This is the dialectic of utility itself; the necessity of a primary object *that utilises*, to a secondary object that becomes utilised, both interdependent in a sense yet both uncovering a *lack* in the movement/operation itself, implying that something necessitates or *requires* utility in the first place. For Hegel, this postulation of dialectical utility *preserves* accident and essence, contingency and necessity, and the non-purposive and purposive, as part of the Absolute Ideas design and it's very specific chain of

[52] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. x (Foreword).

events, which have presented us with our present-day reality (all eventual paths lead to the Absolute Idea but this is our actual—and irreversible—one). It would then be—in a sense—the necessity of contingency, the purposiveness of non-purposiveness and so on (the *identity of* both identity and difference) that is truly characteristic of Hegel's absolute.

In this sense a kind of utility of essence and accident, implicit (real) and explicit (ideal), is maintained (as necessary) and an *analysis of their distinctions* can be carried out (as a phenomenology for example—whether Husserlian, Heideggerian or Harmanian). This theory also allows the *object to be distinct from its content* in the sense that the 'object' that Hegel describes as "what is true … regardless of whether it is known or not"[53] necessarily has to preserve or remain as both implicit and explicit movements of Spirit (Hegel's theory of utility), as both non-conceptual and conceptual (but both logical for Hegel). This is in fact what Hegel says, "there is no knowledge if the object is not there".[54] This is, of course, also aided by our earlier reflections on the *becoming explicit* of objects through Hegel's Spirit, that which can never totalise itself as identity and hence total content.

Not only is Hegel's notion of *utility* being mobilised here to uphold the *ontological necessity of distinctions* which are more accepting to Graham Harman's own philosophy, we also begin to see some common ground between the two: Is Harman's 'real object' that which forever remains implicit, that which (without appearing too anthropomorphic/panpsychic) *refuses* the operation of explicitation? In Hegel's words: "the explication of the notion in the sphere of being does two things: it brings out the totality of being, and it abolishes the immediacy of being, or the form of being as such".[55] Both of these desired results of explicitation are to be categorically refused by Harman: (1) the individual object does not engage in a holistic or equipmental totality of being; (2) the immediate existence of the real object should not be reduced or converted into the "abolition of immediacy" (in other words, Hegel is saying that the explicit

[53] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 59.
[54] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 59.
[55] *Part One of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences: The Logic*. First Subdivision. VII. BEING. p. 84.

notion shows that *everything must be mediated*, and hence the immediate is abolished, but this is opposed to Harman's affirmation of the non-mediated aspect of real objects; the conversion of immediacy into *mediation* might be viewed as a reduction of the immediate into t*he sensual* for Harman). Although Hegel encourages explicitation as the realisation of the Absolute Idea, it seems that Hegel simultaneously upholds the distinction of subject and object, and implicit and explicit content, because such a process (or passage) must be continually instantiated for the dialectic to exist. One may wish to go even further and suggest that the *limit* presupposed in the distinction between subject/object and implicit/explicit is itself a limit that absolute knowledge *knows* and restores in itself.

## 3: Essence as Contradiction

The Hegelian integration of *nothing* into the objects identity, as a "movement into its opposite", a "contradiction", a "negative unity" or a process of sublating nothing into "an aspect of Being", also provides a similar function to the previous attempts at maintaining the distinction between object and subject (or object and human knowledge) because it provides a *determination* that in fact *limits* both the object and subject as an actual *tension* between Being and Nothing (Becoming). Being, qua Becoming, tries to integrate Nothingness or Non-Being into itself, only partially succeeding by *exhibiting* some form of nothingness as a dialectical aspect or movement of Being but never disclosing *nothingness itself* (nothing is always converted into *something*). Hegel sometimes characterises this nothingness as an aspect of circular finitude: "finite things, in their indifferent variety, are therefore just this: to be contradictory, internally fractured and bound to return to their ground"[56] as a movement (and return) to their opposite side of Being (Non-Being) and the negativity that makes up part of their identity. However, there are some Hegel interpreters, like me, who view nothingness as a negation which can never be fully

[56] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Science of Logic*, Cambridge University Press, 2010. p. 384.

sublated or integrated into the teleological system of Hegel[57] (the impossibility of Being's sublation of Nothingness), and hence this leaves us with a spectre of nothingness which cannot be transferred into explicit knowledge, which is in fact a speculative problem for knowledge in a similar way that Brassier sees the problem of extinction for any horizon of thought:

> [T]he earth will be incinerated by the sun 4 billion years hence; all the stars in the universe will stop shining in 100 trillion years; and eventually, one trillion, trillion, trillion years from now, all matter in the cosmos will disintegrate[58]

And:

> The organism cannot live the death that gives rise to the difference between life and death. The death-drive is the trace of this scission: a scission that will never be successfully bound (invested) because it remains the unbindable excess that makes binding possible.[59]

Nothingness indeed finds its place within Hegel's system in several ways but its association with movement, the operation of determinate negation, and the object as a 'negative unity', are all ways of circumscribing nothingness into *utility*: as a nothingness which is never just nothing but maintains the distinctions of subject-object operations, or a nothingness which discloses the finitude of things (and their teleological "Ends" in Hegel's case), or a nothingness which haunts the object like a spectre and encourages the 'fuller' realisation of identity as the *reconciliation* of its contradictory being/non-being dyad and so on. This is very similar to the way that Hegel utilises *exteriority*—as something concomitant or complicit with internal self-consciousness and essence—the Hegelian characterisation of subjectivity as "a being-for-self which is for itself only

[57] As opposed to those who see Nothingness as solely the development or reconciliation of the Being of the Object with its Other.

[58] Brassier, Ray, *Nihil Unbound*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 49.

[59] Ibid., p. 238.

through another", which can never define itself purely in self-relation to an 'ego' but rather through its interaction with the external world, where it becomes aware of its self-consciousness through its relationship with others. Just as subject and object are *retained* in their *utility* whilst simultaneously offering up a newer development of knowledge and a newer more refined topology of object and subject inter-relations, internal and external are also retained as necessary meta-categories, whilst the two are sublated as a movement (or oscillation) of interior and exterior ensconced and given justification through the absolute. "Self-consciousness exists *in and for itself* when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged".[60] However, this "acknowledgement" *through* otherness/exteriority in fact converts the acknowledgement of exteriority (found in the contradistinction of the 'for us') into an *interiority* as soon as it acknowledges 'otherness' as 'for itself'. Although Hegel believes that this subsequent, sublatory identity always trumps the external or *other* it encounters (the *identity of* identity and difference), it becomes harder to affirm the initial distinctions of subject/object in the first place through the ostensible success of absolute sublation, and this is possibly why so many contemporary Hegel scholars dismiss the totalisation of the dialectical process (Adorno and Zizek come to mind).

Although we must affirm a non-translatable aspect in Harman's 'real object', the arena of Harman's objects exist—albeit in a non-totalisable way—in a very similar manner to Hegel's objects; they constantly renegotiate their internal integrity (or self-determination) with external relations.[61] In other words, they are constantly complicit within the tension between the existence of immediate implicit being (the object as immediately real and lacking larger structures of relations) and the mediated, explicit translation that either Harmanian polypsychism[62] or Hegelian

[60] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Lordship and Bongabe, p. 111.

[61] The following passage from Harman is eerily Hegelian; "The relation between an object and its own real qualities (we called this essence) is a relation produced by outside entities". Harman, Graham, *The Quadruple Object*. Zero Books; Illustrated edition. 2011. pp. 106/7

[62] By using Harman's neologism 'polypsychism', I mean the process whereby a ('dormant') object comes to participate in larger contexts of objects through its "mode' of relating and prehending other objects, which will subsequently produce possibilities of "fission" and "fusion" enhancing the explicit identity of the objects involved in such a process.

dialectical process (or Spirit) exhibits. For Hegel, this is achieved simply through the passage of time, the preservation of instances which simultaneously must buckle or progress past the flow of time/history (implicit to explicit).[63] Both philosophers also utilise *the sensual* as an operation of explicitation. Whilst Hegel views the sensual as a motivating/purposive criteria of 'giveness' available to all objects that participate in one's own explicitation/reflection (inviting such to be a "moving shape of consciousness" which leads to the upper echelons of the 'Idea'), Harman allows the 'sensual' to be the fundamental bridge between the confrontation of two 'real' objects, 'prehension' being the sensual translation that ensues between them. We can also establish the opinion that both Hegel and Harman convert (or translate) both nothingness, otherness and alterity into Identity in some way or another. For example, Harman suggests that space—and therefore the spatial aspect of the object—is "both relation and non-relation",[64] which posits non-relation as having an existence, just as Hegel posits nothingness as having an existence within Spirit and its many "exhibited" objects. Furthermore, if Hegel can be seen to sublate differences into identity, such as a newly developed unity of differences (which he exemplifies through his musings on the series of dialectical stages of flowers and plants[65]), Harman can equally be seen to make difference and alterity a surface phenomenon found *on the interior of the object*, as the way the object *translates difference* into an internal, sensual component of itself. This is how Harman safeguards the non-changing and even non-temporal aspect of the real withdrawn object: by displacing movement into a purely relational and hence sensual capacity that rarely affects the dormant interior (or non-relational aspect) of both objects

[63] In other words, time generates a tension between what can be preserved (logically) and how such preserved instances or objects come to renegotiate or abolish themselves through the passing of that time (i.e. new contingencies or developments qua the unfolding of that time).

[64] Harman, Graham, 'The Road to Objects', SubStance, pp. 171–179.

[65] "The bud disappears when the blossom breaks through, and we might say that the former is refuted by the latter; in the same way when the fruit comes, the blossom may be explained to be a false form of the plant's existence, for the fruit appears as its true nature in place of the blossom. The ceaseless activity of their own inherent nature makes these stages moments of an organic unity, where they not merely do not contradict one another, but where one is as necessary as the other; and constitutes thereby the life of the whole." Hegel, G.W.F, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Introduction, 1977.

participating in any confrontation, or by transcribing this sensual movement *into an object itself* which can be defined independently from the non-relational object as opposed to being *sublated by the initial object* à la Hegel.

## 4: Hegel's Fourfold of Unity: Spirit, Perception, Object and Subject

### Spirit

Although Hegel's final unity or 'World Spirit' has been indirectly disputed through Harman's statement that "there is nothing forcing substances to enter into combination with other substances"[66] and "there need not be an infinite progress upwards into larger and larger entities and finally into some "world as a whole",[67] this needs to be qualified a little. For example, whilst Hegel famously criticised Schelling's absolute as a "night in which all cows are black", this does not mean that Hegel argues for multiple substances. The *absolute is one* yet defined differently (dialectically) by thinkers such as Spinoza and Schelling; hence, there is no "forcing substances to enter into each other" in the first place for Hegel as:

> The logical 'movement' which the Phenomenology, like the rest of the system, exhibits, is throughout the logic of the 'side' or 'aspect' or 'moment', of that which, while it can be legitimately distinguished in some unity, and must in fact be so distinguished, nevertheless represents something basically incapable of self-sufficiency and independence, properties which can only be attributed to the whole into which sides, aspects, or moments enter, and a reference to which is accordingly 'built into' each such side.[68]

[66] Harman, Graham, Aristotle with a Twist, Speculative Medievalisms, Punctum, 2013. p. 252.
[67] Ibid., p. 252.
[68] Hegel. G.W.F. The Phenomenology of Spirit, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. ix (Foreword).

As I have argued elsewhere,[69] Hegel's absolute is not some static, airtight whole. It is itself expanding in the sense that it is a *moving whole*,[70] self-determining its own Being/Becoming in relation to its Non-Being component. Being's *absolute* inclusion of *infinity* supports an infinite actuality of determinations, which therefore allows integration of otherness into its autopoietic system as necessary.[71] In H.S. Harris' words, this is a question of "how time comprehends eternity",[72] and whilst "the experience of consciousness must happen in a single lifetime, the phenomenology of Spirit cannot happen so".[73] Not only is there a "groundlessness" or anti-foundational indeterminacy of Being in Hegel, the emergence of what seems to be a logical development (quasi-ground) found in the dialectic is *subsequently* complexified when mediated (or *translated*) through a finite civilisation, collective or "individual who takes a decision that is in itself groundless",[74] the actualisation of the undetermined set of possible determinations concomitant with *a present* (the possibility of "time comprehended in thought",[75] as Hegel used to say). If this sounds a bit like Badiou, it's because it should (!). In a sense, it is the actualisation of the individual (and the subsequent assemblage of decisions shaping a civilisation) that introduces necessity to the infinite movement due to the Subject being capable of articulating *the whole*, whether through 'fidelity' (as in Badiou) or through the implication of the ever-recurring centrality of the subject qua infinity in Hegel (more on this shortly). This is similar in some respects to Meillassoux's thesis because the dialectic, which is a logical result of the expression of this actuality between Being and

[69] Johns, Charles William, Iterations of the Absolute, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.

[70] It is (A) a singularity; the specific and unique way in which eternity is mediated, equivalent to all the specific ways in which humans and other organisms mediate being through consciousness. (B) this mediation may take on spatial dimensions as a way of 'actualising' itself, which Hegel would equate to the process of 'externalisation', which all Ideas/organisms must undergo to some degree.

[71] If Hegel's absolute were to let in a finite amount of determinations, then there would be an incoherence between the infinite capacity of the absolute and the limited number of external determinations affecting it. But if difference is made infinite, then there is just as much of a capacity for difference internal and external to the object, and hence both sides can cross over into the other.

[72] H.S. Harris. *Hegel's Ladder* (Vol 1 & 2). Hackett Publishing. 1997.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Zantvoort, Bart. *Hegel or Meillassoux. The Necessity of Contingency and the Auto-stabilisation of Chaos*. 2022.

[75] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. vii.

Non-Being (Becoming), does not know its own ground but only expresses or extrapolates it. Yet, whilst Hegel's Becoming contains the seed of logical consistency as a kind of unfolding result of the dialectical tension between being and non-being (infinite contingency becomes eternal necessity), Meillassoux will dismiss the credibility of any *consistent*, logical becoming, opting instead for a 'hyper-chaos'. Meillassoux will also dismiss the Hegelian 'eternalization' of contingency, which becomes undermined through Meillassoux's intellectual involvement with Cantorian 'set theory' as proof of the existence of *infinity over eternity*.

Furthering the argument for a more irreducible and process-philosophical theory of Hegel's 'absolute', we can also say that the Hegelian subject only partially understands the dialectic of Spirit through the identifiable objects of their culture or civilisation. It is only when we associate the "unreason" of the *condition for* the dialectic with the *emerging* reason that is characterised in its developing logical qualities that we can *retrospectively* designate such a process as always already necessary, giving us access to the *self-realisable* nature of absolute consciousness. If Hegel associates this with the *contingency of necessity* (the development of an actual logical trajectory *from out of* non-logical or 'empty' origins), then it is Meillassoux who associates this very same process with the *necessity of contingency* (as contingency becomes the new, absolute ontological and epistemological condition for knowledge). Yet, it is coherent to say that Hegel adheres to the *necessity of contingency* also, as it describes the same movement of his dialectic but without prioritising one side over the other (necessity or contingency, as *dialectically informed*). In fact, it becomes apparent that necessity is something that *we convert through experience* (i.e. retracing the necessary steps that have got us here or that suggest some level of (logical) consistency, something that nature has not yet acquired). In Hegel's words:

> Organic nature has no history; it falls from its universal, from life, directly into the singleness of existence, and the moments of simple determinateness, and the single organic life united in this actuality, produce the process of Becoming merely as a contingent movement, in which each is active in its own part and the whole is preserved; but this activity is restricted, so far

> as *itself* is concerned, merely to its centre, because the whole is not present in it, and is not present in it because here it is not *qua* whole *for itself*.[76]

It is safe to say that the present is *qua the whole* when the *in itself* (substance) is converted into the *for itself* of subjectivity (or, on the contrary, "substance becomes subject"[77]), and if you are in the centre—as a form of human experiential presencing—then *infinity makes every acknowledged centre the centre of activity*. Hegel already insinuates that history has followed through its sublations, the decision[78] now is to not only grasp its content but to further test it against the actual (or the negative). That is the true form of the absolute, that is, to reflect and overdetermine as a content necessary *now*. Once the 'for itself' of nature and its objects become epistemologically commensurate with the 'for us'—or once substance is expressed in its highest and truest form qua the subject—the subject reconciles the contradictions that it initially found itself within ("a being-for-self which is for itself only through another" etc.) and "restores its self-unity by recognizing this alienation as nothing other than its own free expression or manifestation".[79]

What does my contemporary critique *of the critique* of Hegel's totalitarianism tell us? It tells us that the concept of unity—that unifies contingency and necessity—as a *metaphysical heuristic* operation is just as important as any argument into the *physical* limits and non-limits of Hegel's metaphysical absolute in relation to earth, the cosmos, everything that 'is' and the fabric of reality itself. In other words, we are talking about a *total relation* between the present, actual instance (of realisation) and an account of infinity that places this instance of realisation *at its centre* as if a centripetal unifying motion forever linking infinity with the finite present. The many Hegelian unifications of eternity within finitude (and vice versa) through *presencing subjects* are not so different from the infinite object-object *translations of the present* qua the sensual in Harmans object-oriented ontology. It is simply that this 'thinking of time' is

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[76] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 179.

[77] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Preface. Oxford University Press. 1977. (Foreword).

[78] "Hegel does not begin with a principle or with a foundation … Thought is a decision." —Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*. University of Minnesota 2002.

[79] Bottomore, Tom. *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1995. p. 122.

generated through the (any) sensual mediation of two real objects and its subsequent qualities as opposed to some promethean, cerebral instantiating Subject. Furthermore, like Aristotle before him, Hegel prioritises the *actual* over the *possible*; Hegel's eternity does not favour the "abstract", "empty" kind found in dogmatic metaphysics. Hegel's eternal is one which is always *actualised* as the many suspended or concrete instances of the *mediation of the eternal* as *determined content*, and its possibilisation (what Hegel terms "real possibility"[80]) comes after this fact (just as the phenomenology describes the experience of an already–actual antecedent logic). Graham Harman also starts with actual objects and then only subsequently asks how relations between such objects are possible.

## Perception

Hegel takes the unity of apperception, or the unity of the manifold, in Kant, and propagates it outside of purely subjective cognition, into our nature and our *elan vital* (Spirit), a speculative realism in cahoots with the reality of the Idea. This results in Spirit birthing many unity's such as the unity of the object, the unity of the subject, the unity of perception, the unity of substance and the unity of Spirit itself. It is essential that this is not misconstrued as a *co-constitutive* act—conventionally defined—within Spirit. The problem with the orthodox interpretation of *co-constitution* is that it assumes that one entity, side, pole, object or concept cannot exist without the other (or that they emerge at the same time), but this is not Hegel's understanding; thought is not co-constituted at the same time as the "many states of things that are inert, external, purposeless, mechanical, contingent, irregular, empirical and brutally real"[81] but emerges *subsequently* as a necessary unfolding of Spirit's expression (we have now included a new element, that of Spirit, to be integrated into the formulation of thought and object). Hegel wishes for us to

[80] This is the Hegelian argument that possibility is itself something found/structured around the present, this actual possibility being different from, say, Meillassoux's 'virtual' which we will look at later in our Meillassoux section. Contingency is "the unity of possibility and actuality". See Brown, Nathan, Speculative Idealism, Speculative Materialism—Hegel, Heidegger, Meillassoux. Video lecture; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twMhZVflfgA&t=2124s.

[81] J.N. Findlay. *Hegel's Use of Teleology* in *Ascent to the Absolute*. 2019 edition. p. 132. Routledge.

view co-constitution as the process of *something emerging from something else* (whilst preserving the prior characteristics of the initial object or process; *sublation*). In this sense, a plethora of distinctions emerge from the Spirit's unfolding into a paradigm of objects and subjects, which eventually culminates (necessarily for Hegel) in the self-realisation of the Idea qua human beings. But as we have seen in the last two sections, there is no prelapsarian harmony between consciousness and matter, subject and object, identity and difference, and so on (Hegel is no panpsychist). But rather, such divisions appear as obstacles for thought, obstacles that have their own ontological reality and independence. It is through "a great deal of transformed inadequacy and error"[82] that any commensuration can happen at all for Hegel, and this sets him infinitely apart from "all those idealistic or spiritualistic philosophers who put mind and rational subjectivity at the origin of things, who make it the ontological background for whatever exists or appears to exist".[83] The movement from implicit to explicit may be seen *retrospectively* as teleological or necessary, but in the actuality of its movement, it becomes already too late (or too soon!) and can only come to understand itself and its past fully after the fact (the owl of Minerva). The same applies to Hegel's notion of utility; it is a glorious result that utility can emerge from non-utility, or that it can emerge and reconceive its earlier non-utility as now essentially utilisable (this is what evolutionary biologists do; they look back at thousands and thousands of years of trial and error and try to suggest that the genus of contemporary civilisation is somehow 'preserved' in the earliest amoebas, eukaryotic cells or bacteria).

Thought and object are only *unilaterally* co-constituted. Hegel states: "there is no knowledge if the object is not there", yet "the object is …regardless of whether it is known or not".[84] We cannot have knowledge without the object, but the object does not require us/human knowledge for its existence (as known or unknown). This suggests two complementary outlooks for Hegel: (1) human knowledge emerges from objects but objects emerge from something else; (2) objects may have

[82] J.N. Findlay. *Hegel's Use of Teleology* in *Ascent to the Absolute*. 2019 edition. p. 131. Routledge.
[83] Ibid., p. 131.
[84] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit,* Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 59.

their own non-human 'knowledge' (if you permit the term) and that the emergence of natural kinds in biology are 'realised' systems of particulars (whether this 'realisation' is dialectically produced from what a 'kind' or a 'particular' comes into contact with, which is either 'translated' or 'withdrawn' between entities in contra-distinction, or, whether—as in Hegel's philosophy of nature—natural 'kinds' and 'particulars' "exhibit" a movement of developing sublation qua Spirit whereby natures objects can adapt or develop whilst including (preserving) their initial intrinsic qualities). It is this latter outlook that allows Hegel to say that the subject-object dynamic is—regardless of its unilaterality—already a type of impartial or embryonic knowledge, whereby both subject and object stem from the same early developing stages of one (dialectico-monistic) spirit. Hence, the individual terms (subject-object/knowledge-object) are preserved independently from one another whilst still acknowledging that *both terms emerge at different points in world spirit and co-exist as preserved differences between the two*. This unilaterality is not simply *spatial* but *chronological*; it is not simply that we cannot reduce the object to the means of human knowledge (the phenomenal/noumenal debate, amongst others) but also that human knowledge depends on perceiving ourselves and our environment as object-like unities (Kant's unity of apperception contra Hume's theatre of fleeting sensations) but the existence of objects *tout court* does not require any form of human participation or our knowledge. It is our inability to accept this fact that designates 'objects' as co-constitutive (and co-emergent) with human perception and knowledge.

Now, regarding this series of historical instances, Hegel then *universalises the subsequent human relation* through two gestures:

(1) He infers that all objects and entities must participate in the dialectical tension of inside and outside and *their own* co-determination (the *co-determination of the object-identity* and *not* the *co-constitution* of both inside and outside). In other words, each object is itself 'correlated' to its environment, its other, its negative and so on, but this is a correlation that the object or subject *owns itself*; it reconciles identity with itself (as a "negative unity"), and it may do this through something else or other but not as *co-producing* something else or other. Human subjectivity may

understand itself though "a being outside itself" or "through another" but this operation does not *co-produce* that outside (or those objects) that we come to identify ourselves *through*.

Whether objects (and subjects) identify themselves in contra-distinction to other objects (a kind of object-oriented perspectivism), or whether they are propelled by some unknown, universal vital force (Spirit) that allows them to change whilst preserving some basic characteristic (vis-à-vis identity), both scenarios are *translated* by the individual object or subject through terms relative to their properties and qualities. Human may translate object, and object may translate human in some cases, but neither co-constitute each other and instead appear as a *series* of developments of the dialectic I have outlined above, which may (historically) transform into another or lead into one another but are not co-constitutive of one another. Or perhaps we should say that knowledge is conducive to the existence of objects, and the existence of a subject is conducive to being a kind of complex object itself, but knowledge (or the bridge of perception) does not create objects itself (unless we are hereby referring to heuristic objects and models).

(2) Hegel suggests that *the space* in which this dialectical process of transformation occurs (or the operation itself) is a *universal* one. This is logically deduced by Hegel through a mediational theory of reality itself, which is that, in order for a quality to be 'posited', it must make determinate (through an act of thinking in its broadest capacity) a hitherto undetermined non-quality. This subsequent actual, posited quality then immediately exists relative to other 'points', and it is my belief that this form of actualisation (similar to Gilles Deleuze[85]) exists and emerges across the board and on the same footing. In Hegel's own words:

> Because it is indeterminate being, it lacks all quality; but in itself, the character of indeterminateness attaches to it only in contrast to what is determinate or qualitative. But determinate being stands in contrast to being in general, so that the very indeterminateness of the latter constitutes its quality. It will therefore be shown that the first being is in itself determinate, and therefore, secondly, that it passes over into determinate being—is

[85] The terms 'actuality' and 'virtuality' are not limited to human consciousness and could be equated, more generally, to the 'composing of chaos' in Félix Guattari's work.

> determinate being—but that this latter as finite being sublates itself and passes over into the infinite relation of being to its own self, that is, thirdly, into being-for-self.[86]

Other than Hegel's synthesis of Being and Non-Being in his triad of logical categories, it is this manoeuvre—of formulating space in terms of objective immediacy, determinateness and the *conditions* for any quality—as opposed to explicitly a form of "outer intuition",[87] that separates him the most from Kant.[88] It has been noted that Harman has said that space is "both relation and non-relation",[89] and this can be equated to the space *of the object*, which includes withdrawn aspects as well as relational aspects. Harman has also described objects as confronting one another in a "shared common space",[90] which suggests that there is something uniform, commensurate and (dare I say) 'objective' to this approach. But here we should use Harman's radical thesis of unilateral translation to argue that space is only ever the product of a sensual translation, existing on the interior of the prehending object, through the multiple tensions between real objects and their sensual qualities.[91] In other words, as soon as we attempt to move from a subjective translation of space into an objective one, we are simply reproducing a particular translation into a universal one without justification (a "view from nowhere"[92]). Hegel must formulate space as both objective, universal, and also as something that includes relation and non-relation *dialectically* (we will speak about

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[86] G.W.F. Hegel. *Science of Logic*. Section One: Determinateness (Quality). Clarendon; 3rd edition. 1975.

[87] Kant famously regards space as a form of outer intuition, whilst deeming time a form of inner intuition and hence neither a property nor a system of relations between independently real things in themselves.

[88] Even though there is some sense of reconciliation with Newtonian principles. According to Friedman, Kant reconstructed Newton's universal gravitation as a "genuine action at a distance through empty space" so that he could "generate a determinate distinction between true and merely apparent motion". Michael Friedman, Kant's Construction of Nature. Cambridge University Press. 2013.

[89] Harman, G. (2011) *The Road to Objects*, SubStance, pp. 171–176.

[90] Harman, Graham, *On Vicarious Causation*, Collapse Vol 2, p. 190. 2007.

[91] See Harman, Graham, *The Quadruple Object*, The New Fourfold (B: Space, Time, essence and Eidos).

[92] Nagel. Thomas. *The View from Nowhere.* Oxford University press. Revised edition 1989.

this link to Harman's work later), due to his insistence that the dialectic found in human subject-object oppositions is something that can be universalised upon all objects. If this dialectic (tension) culminates into its own quintessence in human consciousness, for Harman it simply ripples through the cosmos and refuses to be reserved by any particular species or object.

The question that Harman inadvertently gives us is whether space can really be a universal condition that allows Hegel to conflate *human translation* of space with every object's translation of space. I know that Harman believes that the human relation is but one relation amongst many others and that such relations should remain *on the same footing*, but that they all live together in harmony (let alone objectively) is a different nature of question that should be worth noting.

Furthermore, for Hegel to suggest that this dialectic is the *same one dialectic* expressed through different objects and their own correlational identities is one thing, but to then subsequently translate this dialectic to a realm of "moving shapes of consciousness"[93]—as dialectical experience par excellence—suggests at least two predilections: (1) Spirit (or the Idea) is destined to realise itself through the *phenomenal realm* (the teleology of the Idea becoming 'aware' of itself or its phenomena as a criteria of 'givenness' concomitant with 'realisation'); (2) it is us humans who guarantee this passage of the Idea realising itself through the phenomenal because we have evolved to have ideas ("notions") that disclose the merely sensual as phenomena-logical knowledge and, furthermore, that we have the ability to mediate and synthesise a diverse plethora of object-interactions as a form of universal sublation, which follows the development of the syllogism as it integrates everything in its path as a preserved sequence towards the absolute Idea (as final unity).

This interpretation places object-object relations as essential to Hegel's philosophy, and allows consciousness and knowing to be degrees of relationality emerging from objects in a dialectical relationship with their own 'outside'. Some objects appear infinitely more complex than others, like a human brain in comparison with a chair, but it is worth analysing how such forms of' real object' complexity are initially constructed

[93] G.W.F. Hegel. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford University Press. 1977.

through a variety of *relations* whilst *maintaining* a distinction between object and relation;[94] it is this "complex gap" between the two (relation and non-relation, or time and eidos) where "interbreeding is underway" and human consciousness would seem to be the movements/times (sensual) and confrontations (real) of a complex object encountering other real objects. In Harman's own words, "whatever the special features of plants, fungi, animals, and humans may be, they are simply complex forms of the gap between objects and relations".[95] It is thus these "special features"—in objects—that give rise to various and different relations themselves (like the human intention/conscious relation).

## Object 1: Internal Contradiction

Against Kant, Hegel gives the object its own "Truth", its own 'for itself' that exists independently of the 'for us' as its own passage of self-understanding. This is the unity of the object that exists in his ancient predecessors Plato and Aristotle in very different ways,[96] and amongst other things, it is endowed with its own contradictions, not simply the contradiction we have earlier described as *the finitude of the object* (the simultaneous existence of being and non-being) but also the contradiction of *totality and parts* that Harman finds so appealing regarding his own object-oriented philosophy. In Hegel's words:

> The Object is immediate being, because insensible to difference, which in it has suspended itself. It is, further, a totality in itself, while at the same time (as this identity is only the implicit identity of its dynamic elements) it is equally indifferent to its immediate unity. It thus breaks up into distinct parts, each of which is itself the totality. Hence the object is the abso-

[94] Or maintaining a distinction between *other* relations not necessary for its existence.

[95] Harman, Graham, *The Quadruple Object*, Zer0 Books, 2011, p. 120.

[96] We could simply equate Aristotle with a theory of individual 'substances', whilst for Plato there is a sense that an entity has its own particular unifying character that constantly redefines itself in relation to its Idea (or Ideal) emanation (as well as its more universal qualities which it may 'participate' in).

> lute contradiction between a complete independence of the multiplicity, and the equally complete non-independence of the different pieces.[97]

Whilst Hegel and Harman have differing responses to the 'absolute contradiction' between part and whole in the object, at least this question is upheld by the two as an important philosophical conundrum (harking back to Aristotle and Leibniz most predominantly). Hegel uses the modal distinctions from immediate, to subjective—and then objective—and describes this movement as a teleological process ('means') which passes from "indeterminate universality" to a *particular* actualised instance of that universality, arguing that 'subjectification' is the key here, the subsequent process whereby this actualised particular can become aware of such internal and external differences 'for itself' and is engendered as "End" or "Idea". If Hegel's formulation of the object can be described as the movement of many non-human (or part-human) *logical* stages of in-built *object-oriented awareness*, which functions through realities self-positing qua internal and external operations, Harman's sense of 'object-awareness' is atomised into a plurality of object-object interactions *through the sensual*, where neither one nor several objects have any unified sense of comprehension/awareness other than the immediate and vicarious 'one-to-one' confrontations that each object interiorises in its individual act of prehension. If the real and the sensual is to be maintained in Harman (whilst allowing for various 'cross-breeding' of the two within specific scenarios), then no absolute comprehension of 'the whole', or 'counting' of members/particulars in a 'set', can be achieved, as the *translation* connecting the two cannot transcend any individual object-object encounter.

Although Hegel's theory of unity is somewhat *naturalistic* through the notion that unity provides some kind of 'means' or function for an entity (contradiction or subjectification), and is also *idealistic* in the sense that unity seems to be always commensurate with human thought, phenomenal form and 'universal' forms such as freedom, truth, the state and so on, he still upholds a huge interest in 'difference' and this mutual

[97] Part One of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences: The Logic. Third Subdivision: The Notion B. The Object Development of the Object Mechanism—Chemism—Teleology § 194.

explication of difference and identity would seem to be possible (or emerge) on so many different levels, in the chemical, mechanical and physical domains found mainly in his *philosophy of nature*.

As I have stated, it is a common misconception that Hegel's phenomenology affirms some kind of co-constitution of subject and object. The natural object (as 'immediate being'[98]) does not require the subject to exist, and the subject does not require that the majority of specific objects exist (other than the equipmental context of objects that condition a human's existence but nevertheless do not fully penetrate or determine its every inner working of subjectivity). If Descartes can successfully write a plethora of books on the possibility of doubting the external world, then I think we can entertain the idea that the subject has a quasi-autonomous existence amongst the other objects of our world (these other objects also potentially exhibiting the same kind of autonomy[99]). What happens instead in Hegel is that the object is formulated in a specific manner in order to show how it *mediates itself* just as much as human subjectivity mediates itself. In other words, both objects (subject and object) must deal with themselves as both an object (or conglomerate of properties) and a relation, as both an object and as something which experiences (in the broadest term we can stick with 'mediation'). This Hegelian formulation of the object, as something which necessarily must undergo change, which must mediate this change, which must negotiate difference and identity mutually within this mediation and which must sublate this change whilst simultaneously being preserved stages of its past, is only championed by the attention to the object's existence in object-oriented ontology (the tensions between real objects, sensual objects, real qualities and sensual qualities). The question of *what constitutes an object* is addressed in both thinkers: Hegel opting for a kind of 'naturalist'[100] approach to both objects and Ideas, objects that can integrate differences within themselves and retain differences without becoming something

[98] The bare existence of the object, its presence, regardless of what content it exhibits.

[99] This is Harman's thesis on objects after all.

[100] See DeVries, Willem, *Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity*, Cornell University Press, 1988 for a naturalist account of Hegelian ontology.

else;[101] Harman as describing an object as anything that can be deemed *deeper* than any of its relations, or an *emerging object* as that which produces qualities that were hitherto existent in the initial object.[102]

Lastly, a quick note on Hegelian and Harmanian essences: if modern science has abolished all essences (such as that of natural kinds), then Hegel and Harman's respective formulations of essence are yet to be supplanted through such scientific advancements because Hegel's essence is contra the present-at-hand attitude of science and points towards the trajectory and culmination of logical developments that themselves cannot be reducible to either 'presencing' or the empirical (let alone the objects relation to Non-Being, which would make most scientists wince). Equally, Harman's essence—at least when concerning the 'real object'—seems to be that stubborn aspect of the object which retains its non-relational element, and because modern science does not operate on the idea that both relationality and non-relationality exist within the object (and space and time at large), their current modes of *access* quickly become futile. Other than the *ideal* essence in Hegel and the *real* essence in Harman, there is also both the Hegelian and Harmanian notion of a *finite essence*, that which can emerge and perish but which nevertheless has/had a *particular* structure (Hegel) or particular eidetic or withdrawn nature[103] (Harman) *irreducible* to external or corresponding elements.

## Object 2: Sublation/Self-Limit

There are a plethora of techniques that anchor change, difference and alterity back into an object-unity in Hegel. If we take 'sublation' for example, it is acknowledged amongst Hegel scholars that the concept of

[101] An object that is expressed qua the whole ('for itself) and not the product of the contingencies of nature.

[102] I have to recommend Niki Young's writings on the positive notion of an object in OOO. See Object, Reduction, and Emergence: An Object-Oriented View. https://philpapers.org/rec/YOUORA.

[103] There appears to be at least two essences in Harman's philosophy from a reading of *The Quadruple Object*: that of Husserlian-inspired 'eidos' of the sensual object and that of the Heideggerian-inspired 'withdrawn' nature of any object that cannot be reduced to the relation of human presencing or any one or several relations between objects.

synthesis operates in a sublatory fashion whereby thesis and antithesis are preserved yet overcome in their antagonism. However, it must be asked what 'parts' of both antagonistic sides are preserved and whether their integration is *evenly* sublated ('down the middle') or whether certain aspects of both antagonistic sides are "brought out" more than others. If the very relation between two antagonistic sides is sublated by a third synthetic term, then such initial differences cannot have any further effect on anything else unless through this 'higher' operative synthetic unity. Take the simple example of the colours blue and yellow making green. Now, if we apply the same Hegelian formula and suggest that green now acts as simultaneously an integration of yellow and blue whilst becoming a new 'developed' form, then the initial blue and yellow cannot have any agency other than through this 'third' green term (subsequently leaving it to the colour green to affect or become new colours in some sort of artistic arrangement/composition). Hegel mobilises the same logic in his theory of forms; in his writings on flowers (and plants), he states that the *internal* differences that the flower undergoes in its stages of development, as well as the *external* differences appearing extraneous to (yet part-conditioning) the flower's 'being', are *retained* through the *unity of such differences* qua the flower itself. This unity of differences is a series of refutations similar to the thesis—antithesis—synthesis formula:

> The bud disappears when the blossom breaks through, and we might say that the former is refuted by the latter; in the same way when the fruit comes, the blossom may be explained to be a false form of the plant's existence, for the fruit appears as its true nature in place of the blossom. The ceaseless activity of their own inherent nature makes these stages moments of an organic *unity*, where they not merely do not contradict one another, but where one is as necessary as the other; and constitutes thereby the life of the whole.[104]

Hegel surely places *unity* in the capacity of *substances* to both trace and retain this dialectic, a heuristic 'synthesis' itself being the existence of *an object* which brings together differences (a "unity of differences") whether

[104] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Preface. Oxford University Press. 1977. (My italics).

by contradiction or by internal/external tensions (the very existence of internal/external, or being and nothingness, is identified in *the object par excellence*). Hegelian identity is the identification of *both* identity and difference in the *object*; both necessary and unnecessary features being simultaneously within the object. This acknowledgement is the negation of the negation (as identity). This dialectical trajectory and unity of the object can be said to have a loose criteria: what an object can *retain* dialectically and what must become a *whole* of a separate piece itself. This oscillation occurs between a 'piece of the whole' and a 'whole of the piece'.

Harman enacts similar movements in his object ontology: (1) he relegates the majority of change to the interior of an object 'experiencing' such change qua the sensual; (2) he makes the relation of cause itself *asymmetrical* by allowing each individual object in any confrontation to have its own unique translation of the cause *distinct* from the other object participating in such a confrontation (unless the two objects are "fused" together, temporarily making a new object).

The possible interaction (or 'synthesis') between two ('real') objects is always translated asymmetrically through what Harman terms a 'total relation'.[105] Take, for example, my sincere relation to a tree. For the tree not to completely fuse into my experience and—subsequently—possible knowledge of it, the real tree must be able to withdraw from any direct access I have with it whilst offering up a sensual intermediary 'object' which is "bridged" through the human (as the sensual must only emerge on the interior of a real object with the *capacity for* a 'sensual object', a "bridge" to another object qua the sensual). But I quickly find that myself as a real object and the sensual object that vicariously and mysteriously emanates from the real object of the tree are together unified in this act; it is the perception that places both myself and the sensual facade of the tree *within* this experience, and any sense of change, difference or alterity will appear *in this realm*, not the real (non-relational) object of the tree itself.[106] In this sense, any *external* difference will be inevitably presented on the *interior* of an object translating such difference (embodiment),

[105] Harman, Graham, *On Vicarious Causation*, p. 197. Collapse Vol 2. Urbanomic. 2007.

[106] Unless in rare moments where the sensual affects the real or vice versa.

and any "real difference"[107] will be *unilateralised* as one object sensually translating another, and vice versa (asymmetrical connection).[108] Both appear as sublations, onto the interior of an object, or onto *one* side of the relation.

This decision, to unilateralise the object as having a non-relational/non-perceptual side and to unilateralise causation as asymmetrical and "vicarious", may have underlying origins in the position that no amount of exteriority or contextual "conditions" will be able to reduce the object to a series of arbitrary, vitalistic or teleological processes. In Grant's critical response to Harman's work, he states: "(T)he origin of form problem thus encounters the problems of genesis not extrinsically, but intrinsically, since either substantial forms – the 'non-accidental forms of individual things', as Harman puts it – are always what they are, or they become what they are".[109] Similar to Hegel, the internal takes precedence over the external and presents this triumph in *objects*, although for Hegel, the question is not one of internal or external *determination* (as both play dialectical roles in Hegel's work) but rather of the power of *interiorisation* as a process, mechanism or operation. This is why Hegel's 'essence' is dynamic and is derived from the *logical* trajectory of an Idea (its design) as an interiorising principle, whilst Harman's essences are *contained* in the *actual object* (*as having a real withdrawn essence, real particular qualities orreal sensual qualities*).

## Object 3: Relation and Non-Relation/Being and Non-Being

In the 2007 conference on Speculative Realism at Goldsmiths College, London, Harman stated that he has

[107] Bryant, Levi, *The Ontic Principle: Outline of an Object-Oriented Ontology*—"to be is to make or produce differences". Re:Press pp. 261–278. The Speculative Turn. 2011.

[108] As opposed to the *symmetrical* formulation of cause in Newtons 'third law': "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction".

[109] Grant, Iain Hamilton, *Mining Conditions: A Response to Harman.* The Speculative Turn. Re: Press 2011. pp. 42–43.

> been speaking openly in the past few years in defence of the infinite regress and the infinite progress … I don't actually have a totality of the world. There are just objects as far as you look. I never come to the end of them and say there's a largest object that contains them all, precisely for the reason you mention, because then you'd have a final, present-at-hand—in the Heideggerian sense—present-at-hand totality which was constituted totally of relations and which itself was nothing but relations. And I can't have that, for the same reason that I can't have a smallest particle, because then you'd have a tiniest present-at-hand atom that had no other qualities, because it would have no relational structure at all.[110]

In his paper *Time, Space, Essence, and Eidos: A New Theory of Causation*, Harman makes what I believe to be an analogous point: "an aggregate is like a substance when viewed from the outside".[111] The definition of an *absolute totality*—whether defined as 'the whole' or as individual entities—does not allow for itself to have qualities that are not intrinsic to it, yet "viewed from the outside", the so-called 'totality' is situated in another type of space, as possessing specific qualities, and therefore foregoing any sense of totality *as containment*. This antinomy seems inevitable for Harman, and, as we will see, it is in fact affirmed. Furthermore, the tiniest, most fundamental constituent of reality cannot itself be *totally* given because this *present-at-hand* description (e.g. atomism) denies the essential notion that anything present must necessarily depend on a plethora of absent or withdrawn features of the object (let alone the idea that *the sensual* profile of the atom is always relative and perhaps *temporal*[112] regarding the objects 'givenness').

In my humble opinion, the position proposed above is implicitly for *the immanent co-constitutive nature of relation and non-relation*; we cannot have nothing but relations, yet we cannot have an object "with no relational structure at all"; hence, a 'dialectical' operation is formulated similar to Hegel's. Take this passage, for example:

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[110] Collapse Vol 3 p. 400. Urbanomic. 2012 (reissued edition).

[111] Harman, Graham. *Time, Space, Essence, and Eidos: A New Theory of Causation*. Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy, vol. 6, no. 1, 2010 p. 5.

[112] As Object Oriented scholar Niki Young so concisely puts it; "(F)or Harman, what we call "time" is forged through the tension between a sensual object and its respective sensual qualities existing within the "experience" of some object, whether human or otherwise". Young, Niki, All Objects Are Bound by Time, 2022.

> *Objects must be conceived as autonomous individuals not entirely disconnected from their components, or from the other things against which they bitterly or happily strike. Yet it must also be seen that they are sealed off from one another.*[113]

Harman's inclusion of both relation and non-relation, exemplified in these passages, is linked to the idea that *space* itself contains both of these things; in Niki Young's words, Harman

> refutes both the Newtonian interpretation of space as an absolute container and the Leibnizian view that treats space as a system of relations. Instead, he claims that space involves 'both relation and non-relation'. On the one hand, space is "non-relational" to the extent that whatever object is "in" space is "withdrawn" from direct access and 'ensconced in its own private place'. On the other hand, space is also relational in that each object 'belongs to the same spatial arena' as another simultaneously" … which … "also implies that each 'is positioned at a determinate distance' relative to another, and is thus also related to it in some loose way.[114]

It would seem that this particular formulation of *space*—as relation and non-relation—works in the same way that Hegel dialectically formulates *Becoming* as both Being and Non-Being. If the capacity to negate or refute is a *processual* one for Hegel, and if this negative logic ("determinative negation") depends on the Becoming of existence in relation to its Non-Being which somewhat propels it, then we might say that the Non-Being, which is *not completely subsumed by Becoming*, is the moment where relationality is terminated. Not only does Non-Being allow objects to transition and contradict themselves (the *movement* between Being and Non-Being; Becoming), but it also provides an opposite that cannot be fully related to or subsumed (Non-Being "in-itself"). The only Non-Being we can posit is *through* the Being or Becoming of existence (or the mediation), and we cannot know it outside of these conditions. In this sense, Non-Being has a *positive* (or 'utilitarian') function in that it acts as the propelling negative of Being (which Being must mediate), and the

[113] Harman, Graham, *Aristotle with a Twist, Speculative Medievalisms*, Punctum, 2013. p. 238.
[114] Young, Niki, *All Objects Are Bound by Time*. Zero Books, 15 Years of Speculative Realism, 2022.

metaphysical impasse (nothingness) which stops relationality from subsuming all of existence and making relationality a self-identical Being. Of course, Hegel introduces Non-Being precisely to refute the notion that Being is *self-identical* (trapped in its own positive/static mode of appearing or present-at-hand state). In this sense, Hegel and Harman use Non-Being and Non-relation in a similar way, that is, Hegel in order to allow movement, otherness and contradiction, yet also the irreducibility of Non-Being to relationality (the negative unity of the object), and Harman to instantiate both withdrawn and vicarious, real and sensual, aspects of space as both non-relational and relational. Another proof of this integration is that Hegel allows relations to become subsumed *as objects* (relations can turn into higher organisations of objects such as nature) and Harman equally follows suit by *making relations objects in themselves* that emerge as having real (non-relational) qualities.[115]

In Hegel, Being must differentiate itself in the act of its own self-mediation, this differentiation, determination or opposition being famously reinscribed as a necessary part of Being's own non-ground, the emergence of necessity (or the contingency of necessity and even necessity of contingency). This mediation or determination itself expresses a division in Being whereby Being must *move away from itself* (it's empty self-identity) and hence constitute a Non-being element outside of it (dialectically). This scenario would imply some loose form of Non-Being, even if it is to simply suggest the *eventual union* of Being with Non-being/ Nothing, the "popular, especially oriental proverbs, that all that exists has the germ of death in its very birth, or that death, on the other hand, is the entrance into new life".[116]

However, that being said, it is always *Becoming* which "exhibits" this simultaneously physical and meta-physical relation to—or existence of—Non-Being. In other words, Being and Non-Being (Nothingness) are forever mediated by Becoming as a movement, lack, subtraction or negation, or as the Becoming of Being or even the Becoming of Nothing (although Hegel argues that this latter option is merely a tautology):

[115] See Harman, Graham, *On Vicarious Causation*, Collapse Vol 2, Urbanomic, 2007, p. 207.

[116] Hegel. G.W.F. Science of Logic. Cambridge University Press. 2015.

> Ex nihilo nihil fit—is one of those propositions to which great importance was ascribed in metaphysics. In it is to be seen either only the empty tautology: nothing is nothing; or, if becoming is supposed to possess an actual meaning in it, then, since from nothing only nothing becomes, the proposition does not in fact contain becoming, for in it nothing remains nothing. Becoming implies that nothing does not remain nothing but passes into its other, into being.[117]

Regarding Being and Non-Being, it seems that Becoming is what actualises these two initially abstract, empty and 'in-itself' terms, and propels them into motion as a *concrete mode of existence*. The plant, subject, animal, society and pebble are all caught between this contradiction, which is personified in the finitude of every object "passing over into its opposite". However, because finitude is seen *dialectically* (regarding both Non-Being and Being from mutual sides) as a *positive contradiction* that sustains life (the Being of things), and is itself an infinite process (an infinite process of many finitudes), this would suggest that Non-Being has some sort of positive relation in its singular actuality qua Becoming. I say *singular* because the speculative realist in me wants to imply the possibility of many different Becomings of Being and Non-Being which are not accounted for by the specifically *tellurian* Becoming that Hegel associates with the particular spatio-temporality of *the earth* and its phenomenal forms.

The argument here is to imagine *Non-Being as non-relation*: Non-being as that which neither Being nor Being's Becoming can fully relate to, and can only really extrapolate through relations *failure* to fully sublate non-relation (albeit Being does integrate Non-Being somewhat into its process, as Becoming). This failure is of course a 'positive' one, in that an object's mediation with itself requires Non-Being to allow it to Become, what Hegel calls *determinate negation*. One could even argue that the *modal dualism* between subject and object, and non-realised object and realised object ('for itself'), is itself maintained through the inclusion of both relation and non-relation, Being and Non-Being; such modal dualisms create the epistemological and ontological dualisms found in Hegel's

[117] Ibid.

philosophy (i.e. how an object relates to itself and its environment *whilst not being reduced to that relation alone*, or how an object crosses over from *being self-identical* to reconciling negation as a process of its development). It is this same modal dualism—between relation and non-relation—that gives the object the capacity to both 'withdraw' and indirectly relate in Harman's ontology, as well as articulating a new understanding of Harman's distinction between 'real' and 'sensual' object, the former as a non-relational entity and the latter as a relation entity. The 'tension' that Harman already argues is constitutive—or derivative—of space and time is hence this modal dualism so eloquently articulated by Hegel, a dualism that is accounted for differently by both philosophers yet operates in a similar way. Although Hegel uses Non-Being as an immanent, negative movement of Being (Becoming) in dialectical fashion, Harman does not escape this even though he regards his philosophy as asymmetrical. Relation and Non-Relation exist and pass over into each other's domain. A relation can become an object itself or exist deep within the internal "domestic" relations of an object, whilst a non-relation can be suddenly brought into relational existence, indirectly, through what Harman calls "allure".

In this light, the delineation of any *absolute*, as containment, as non-relative, as independent, as autonomous and so on, emerges as the result of this simultaneous integration and tension between relation and non-relation/Being and Non-being, involved in the smallest of objects to the largest, and in this sense we have an *iteration of the absolute* which is contained in the smallest atom to the largest universe. This appears *absolute* because both thinkers integrate or contain opposites within this inclusive gesture: relation and non-relation, Being and Non-Being, and hence the spectrum of differences will always be *included* within these two poles. This iteration does away with any *opposition* between relational, holistic ontologies, and non-relational, formal ontologies, one with an open, modifiable system of relations in contrast to another with a closed set of definitive substances, because *the medium of reality includes both* (relation and non-relation), and the designation of where relation ends and non-relation starts (or vice versa) can be *arbitrarily* placed in the smallest of objects to the largest; as the natural kinds or particulars in biology, as the unified existence of the object, as an "autopoietic system

that produces and reproduces its own elements as well as its own structures",[118] or as the absolute *whole* of those seventeenth- to nineteenth-century metaphysicians of substance (Spinoza and Hegel most predominantly). Even the 'problem of infinity' is not exempt from this charge; there could be an infinity of relational/non-relational 'units' that go on forever whilst displaying some sort of non-relational element of withdrawal or containment. Although non-relation is here characterised as 'closed off', while relation appears as 'open', this cannot subsequently be the case if reality equally includes both non-relation and relation as deeply integrated "all the way down". This theory seems comfortable in Harman's philosophical universe; we already know that an "aggregate can become an object from the outside"—whether as the deep infinite regress of parts, of atoms and so on, or as the complicit qualities of any large, hyper-object that contains "a large quantity of finitudes" but can also be viewed as existing within a space that will disclose present-at-hand and readiness-to-hand qualities. In other words, relation and non-relation are present *tout court*. It is worth asking ourselves whether both present and absent relations and non-relations—and given and non-given relations and non-relations—must necessarily (or exclusively) occur as *objects*. It seems clear for Harman that it does, and Hegel's phenomenology is situated within the conflict zone between objects (and subjects) and their *relationality* (of mediation/comprehension qua the dialectical logic of appearances/the sensuous) whilst there remains a sort of quasi-non-relational substance to the object whereby relations are sublated into the totality (non-relation) of absolute Being (Hegel) under a specific identity or form (Plato), which Hegel usually defines as the objects "purpose" or "role" which rises above any one relational determination. However, if this tension between relation and non-relation exists 'all the way down' (as infinite regress) it is hard to make a clear distinction between the notion that all objects can be infinitely broken down into further 'objects' of relation and non-relation (real and sensual/withdrawn and given/manifest) and the notion that this dualism is a kind of primary bedrock of (and even an 'undermining' theory of) the fundamental constituents of reality. In other words,

[118] Luhmann, N. (2012). *Theory of Society*, Volume 1. Trans. Rhodes Barrett. Stanford: Stanford University Press. p. 32.

atoms, quarks, parasites, diseases and string theory must also possess this absolute iteration of relation and non-relation, and it must not be romantically bestowed upon "middle-sized objects", natural kinds, organisms and any other prejudicial designation of essence (as some secret location of "purpose" (Hegel) or unit/unity (Harman).

Regarding Hegel, the notion of relation and non-relation is hereby characterised as the co-existence of Being and Non-Being. Hegel argues that Non-Being is attached to every object as that which simultaneously acts as the object's own *limit* whilst expressing the *movement* of Pure Being in proximity to Non-Being through the object's *Becoming*.[119] Becoming in fact means *contradiction* in many ways for Hegel, the 'working through' of this opposition between Being and Non-Being. Subsequently, *actuality*, determination or what Hegel called "the concrete" can then be seen as a *suspension* between these two poles, that is, the actual becoming between these two poles. It is this very (temporal) suspension expressed as *a specific object's particular and concrete existence*, and it is this which *limits* the object: as 'that' object, existing within 'that' tension at 'that' specific time. Limit is in a sense analogous to *actuality*, whilst the indeterminate could be hereby defined as a 'virtual' capacity ("lacking any qualities"[120] yet still "immediate"[121]).

In this regard, I would argue that both Hegel and Harman have a *positive* definition of *limit* attached to their theories on objects (and the subject as object). The co-existence (or the *absolute* integration) of Being and Non-Being *holds the object together* in many respects, as an object torn between its movements, and therefore limited and determined as *concrete*. The object without this dialectic is a "dead object"[122] just as "pure being" is a dead concept that attempts to "exclude any external or internal

[119] *Becoming* is hereby seen as a logical process (of "unfolding") in contrast to the pure indeterminacy of *Being*. It is this constant and perpetual translation of Being into Becoming which allows Hegel to situate (and unify) both *contingency and necessity* within the actual, concrete existence of Becoming.

[120] G.W.F. Hegel. *Science of Logic. Section One: Determinateness* (Quality). Clarendon; 3rd edition. 1975.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Graves. Alice. A. *Hegel's Doctrine of Contradiction*. The Journal of Speculative Philosophy, January, April 1888, Vol. 22, No. 1/2 (January, April 1888), pp. 118–138 Published by: Penn State University Press.

relation to itself".[123] The co-existence of relation and non-relation formulated in Harman's philosophy, stemming from the concept of *space as both relational and non-relational* (but surely also stemming from the dialectic between real qualities and the real object (domestic relations), sensual objects with their own real qualities, and other variations/pairings of the real and sensual (RO, SO, RQ, SQ[124])), also performs a similar function to Hegel by distinguishing the real object from the sensual, by giving it a *limit* (essence), but also by allowing the real to *positively exist* as something that can only be translated (related) indirectly (*not knowing the known*[125]). And whilst the *movement* between non-relational and relational can be depicted as a *difference in degree* from the outside or some sort of neutral (Gods-eye) perspective (i.e. there are movements in both Hegel and Harman whereby a relation can turn into a non-relational element and vice versa), the *embodied* category of *being an object* seems as if a *difference in kind*; an object is demarcated in contradistinction to any extraneous relation (they have different modes of existence) *regardless of whether one can move into the other*.

## Endnote

The *absolute* gesture of including relation and non-relation, and Being and Non-Being, in Hegel and Harman's work, uniquely asserts the positive existence of an object whilst equating such to a kind of *limit*: the limit of actuality (Hegel) and the limit of the non-perceptual, real object (Harman). I can think of at least two formulations of limit that Hegel and Harman significantly work against: (1) the pejorative limit of finitude and (2) the pejorative limit of identity (or form). Let's take the first example. Traditionally, this limit, the limit of finitude that Harman pluralises onto all objects and that Hegel gives infinite occurrence to, is seen

[123] Hegel's Use of Teleology. J.N. Findlay. *Ascent to the Absolute*. 2019 edition. p. 132. Routledge.

[124] Real object, sensual object, real qualities, sensual qualities. See Harman's The Quadruple Object, Zer0 Books, 2011.

[125] This returns us to the first section of this chapter, where I argue that Meillassoux asserts that he can *know the unknown/unreason/hyperchaos*, whilst Harman can*not know the known*, or not know the positively real existence of an object 'in-itself' (i.e. the 'in-itself' exists but is never given).

as some tragic *pejorative* limit: "finitude, the idea that we cannot speak of reality outside its givenness to us",[126] or, alternatively, the obsession with our mortality, "there is neither finitude nor negativity in the heart of objects. And each case of human mortality is just one tragic event among trillions of others, including the deaths of house pets, insects, stars, civilizations, and poorly managed shops or universities. The Heidegger-Blanchot death cult must be expelled from ontology, and perhaps even from metaphysics".[127]

In Hegel and Harman's metaphysics, the extrapolation of a kind of *arbitrary finitude* upon all objects, as either entities limited by their own finite prehension or objects propelled towards a series of transformative stages that finitude affords them, is heralded as both a realist endeavour and a *condition for knowledge* (or prehension). But this is dialectically supported by either an infinity that couches such operations (or more aptly Hegel's eternity), which various finitudes resolve themselves though, or the non-sensual (and hence non-temporal) aspect of Harman's 'real object' (that DeLanda criticises as not being realist enough in Harman's thesis[128]).

Secondly, the pejorative limit of *identity* or form seems equally disheartening; the limit of identity that must be overcome in various post-structuralist philosophy, the subordination of 'sameness' through the deconstructive manoeuvre of différance or the vitalism of difference in Deleuze. Yet the Hegelian notion of identity under attack by such twentieth-century thinkers has been hugely misconstrued. Hegelian identity is infact a formulation of identity that *includes difference* as a necessary aspect of it, as a passage that *changes identity* or as a set of *preliminary* determinations (under constant revision) like Hegel's *Notion*, which unsettles the pure or static identity of any concept through the constant revisionism of *form and content*. In Hegel's words:

> In the logic of understanding, the notion is generally reckoned a mere form of thought, and treated as a general conception. It is to this inferior view of the notion that the assertion refers, so often urged on behalf of the heart

[126] http://figureground.org/interview-with-graham-harman-2/.

[127] Harman, Graham, *On Vicarious Causation*, Collapse, Vol 3, 211.

[128] See Harman, Graham/DeLanda, Manuel, *The Rise of Realism*. Wiley. 2017.

> and sentiment, that notions as such are something dead, empty, and abstract. The case is really quite the reverse. The notion is, on the contrary, the principle of all life, and thus possesses at the same time a character of thorough concreteness. That it is so follows from the whole logical movement up to this point, and need not be here proved. The contrast between form and content, which is thus used to criticise the notion when it is alleged to be merely formal, has, like all the other contrasts upheld by reflection, been already left behind and overcome dialectically or through itself. The notion, in short, is what contains all the earlier categories of thought merged in it. It certainly is a form, but an infinite and creative form which includes, but at the same time releases from itself, the fullness of all content. And so too the notion may, if it be wished, be styled abstract, if the name concrete is restricted to the concrete facts of sense or of immediate perception. For the notion is not palpable to the touch, and when we are engaged with it, hearing and seeing must quite fail us.[129]

Interestingly, enough, as I have shown more explicitly and in depth in my latest book *Object Oriented Dialectics*,[130] this passage also states that the 'Idea' of any object may be *in excess of the object*, and therefore "not palpable to touch, hearing or seeing", similar to Harman's notion that the essence of the real object is "withdrawn" from the same modes of access.

Limit *as identity*, as the explicit movement of realisation *at that particular time*, as a form of determination or as the confines of any withdrawn real object, allows us to think of the *utility of identity* through a backdrop of contingency (Hegel) or of critical Kantian philosophy (the noumenal identity) where both assertions take more than a hint of *speculation*. We can even blend our positive notion of finitude with this positive notion of identity/form, as complementary; it has been said that the objects prehension of its environment, guided by its finite features, in Harman's ontology, has some sort of intrinsic awareness, similar to the operation of Hegelian sublation which integrates and preserves what it encounters and accumulates. In Ray Brassier's words:

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[129] Part One of the Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences: The Logic. Third Subdivision: The Notion.

[130] Johns, Charles William, *Object Oriented Dialectics*, Mimesis Press, 2022.

> (I)n order to interact with one another, it seems that objects need to' know' something about one another. The fire must 'know' that the cotton is not rock; the rock must 'know' that the ice is not water. Whatever kind of interaction objects have, the fact that their interface is possible on the basis of this recognition of something like sensual properties, which are capable of locking together and causing the interaction – well, I think the question is whether it is possible to explain how objects discriminate between the sensual or perceptible and the imperceptible properties of any other object.[131]

Both Hegelian and Harmanian accounts give absolute status to the smallest of constituents, "middle-sized objects" and more speculative totalities through the role of both relation and non-relation (Being and Non-Being), and both explicate a notion of limit which could be *politically* invested as that which maintains a distinction between relation and non-relation, or allows one to successfully move into the other, as well as to produce the products/objects of such activity. The self-limit of the object for both Hegel and Harman, whether through *withdrawal*, *retention* (what the object retains or sublates) or concrete *becoming* (contradiction,) is the actual equilibrium of the concrete object between its being and non-being ontological poles/tensions or the absolute tension between the mutual existence of relation and non-relation.

This may have some indirect relation to the contemporary discourse on *the principle of individuation*; the current inclination towards an "openness to each individual object's own horizon of possibility"[132] with a specific interest in "trees", "blades of grass" and other such manifest and natural entities, because individuation—as argued here—is universalised as somewhat arbitrary in Hegel and Harman's ontology, especially if we include within this menagerie of objects the concept of 'infinite regress', which views every "aggregate as an object when viewed from the outside". Hence, the integration of enzymes, neutrons, brains and specific diseases may show the former principle of naturalist individuation—in materialism and strands of realism—to still be a *humanalltoo human* affair.

[131] Brassier, Ray, Collapse Volume 3, Urbamonic, p. 317. Reissued edition 2012.

[132] Cogburn, Jon. Social media correspondence 11/5/2022.

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# 3

# Ray Brassier: Eliminativism or Negation?

## Introduction

### Which Hegel?

Moving from the more Aristotelian-inspired reading of Hegel found in his philosophy of *nature*, characterised through his self-fulfilling notions in nature, his inclination towards 'natural kinds' and unities (which express the whole), his inclination towards the *form* over the *material*, mechanisms of sublation, and mechanical, chemical and teleological relations, focus will now be aligned to Hegel's specific theory of *mind* and its relation to *Spirit* in order to tackle philosophical questions of sensation, cognition, the negative, negation, determination, the Notion and the characterisation of these terms in relation to consciousness. Hence, we have already found a double meaning to Hegel's *Geist*; if it meant the encompassing context of both mental activity and nature in our chapter on Hegel and Harman (as one self-othering *substance*), it now returns to a more 'conservative' reading of 'Geist' as *mind*, as a form of negative activity exclusive to human consciousness/subjectivity. In a sense, this latter reading characterises the many prior syllogisms of nature as purely

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C. W. Johns, *Hegel and Speculative Realism*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-32657-8_3

logical (albeit a becoming-logical), whilst *human negation* discloses a specific power, the power to "self-other" or subtract oneself from the immediate self-same identity of consciousness and in a sense create a "dissolution"[1] that propels Spirit in some potentially discontinuous and even sporadic way. This more 'conservative' reading of geist/mind deals with consciousness' own self-activity, and the relationship between consciousness as an object 'for us' and consciousness as an object 'in-itself'. And if consciousness is its own *self-activity*, then we must ask whether our "notion corresponds to the object" (the object of knowledge), and Hegel's profound and provocative point is that this distinction—between our access to knowledge and knowledge 'in-itself' or as object—is a distinction itself found in consciousness, and hence the distinction falls away. Yet this only validates the autonomy of consciousness and not the extent to which it can exhaust objects with this knowledge. In other words, Hegel is suggesting that we should try to correspond the Notion to the object (the instrument of knowledge with knowledge itself) and vice versa, as an adequate immanent (dialectical) method. The 'being-for-another' of knowledge as a relation to something other (the object) and the 'being-in-itself' of the potential identity of knowledge as a whole (or as object) apply to each other and are essentially the same moving whole. In this regard, we will be staying with *The Phenomenology of Spirit* throughout these discussions.

We may wish to move our focus to the Hegelian oscillation between mind and object (and spirit and nature) found in those early passages of *The Phenomenology* and concentrate on the relation between sensation and cognition[2] regarding Brassier's critical interest in the crux between eliminative materialism and the emergence of rational agency. What Brassier seems interested in (at least in his chapter on Wilfrid Sellars) is the credible possibility of the transition (and emergence) between material processes and intentional, rational behaviour in 'subjects' which emphasises the propositional, linguistic and *functional*[3] role of both

[1] Hegel, G.W.F. The Phenomenology of Spirit, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 18.

[2] As Willem deVries expertly exemplifies in his book *Hegel's Theory of Mental Activity*, chapter 4: Sensation: Minds Material. Cornell University Press, 1988.

[3] Brassier stresses that Sellar's account of thought is not ontological; it does not—unlike Kant and Hegel—lay claim to a specific ontological status but in fact leaves this open for further revision (if indeed revision is necessary).

language and its relation to concepts (as "internal speech-like episodes[4]). In other words, Sellars account—although Kantian in sentiment—veers away from the *transcendental* account associated with the necessity of the subject, the self-realisation of the subject, the indeterminacy of the subject and so on tied to the Hegelian (and even German idealist) legacy and searches for a more complex integration of the conceptual with a robust form of naturalism. However, the Hegelian relationship between sensation and cognition may still aid us in establishing a relationship between material processes and cognition, especially as sensation is already described as the "immediate *material* of mental activity"[5] in Hegelian philosophy and subsequently *has content*.[6] In other words, a look at how Hegel characterises *quality* as already having a sense of *determinateness* (content) may complexify the analogy of "(thought) episodes… 'in' language-using animals as molecular impacts 'in' gases"[7] (i.e. what *content* do such molecules have?).

Just as this section could possibly *critique* the vitalism, animism and panpsychism of *the dialectic* and of *objects* in general in the previous chapter on Harman, we must still remain sceptical of the claim that there is a deeply evolved and complex self-activity (and relative autonomy) of mind without the speculation that nature—and the world as a whole[8]—also expresses this activity and is accessible as various 'Ideas', teleological and ideal types and kinds, which ultimately fuses the subjective with the objective under Hegel's notion of 'objective purpose',[9] all discredited by Brassier in order to safeguard some epistemological credibility.[10] The distinction between mind and nature seems to revolve around notions of

[4] Brassier, Ray, Nihil Unbound, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 4.

[5] DeVries, Willem, p. 68.

[6] In deVries' words; "We have seen in what sense sensations have content: preserving within the mind a quality-space equally applicable to the outer objects causally responsible for the sensations. The sense in which higher cognitive states have a content is different, though not unrelated. The intentionality of sense is not the full intentionality of the higher cognitive processes" (p. 70).

[7] Brasier, N.U. p. 5.

[8] See Willem deVries, *Hege's Theory of Mental Activity*, Cornell University Press, 1988. p. 16.

[9] Ibid.

[10] In Ray Brassier's words, "reifying concepts as entities is a category mistake. Concepts have functional coordinates but not spatiotemporal ones". Interview with Leon Niemoczynski (2017).

interiority and exteriority for Hegel, as well as a notion of 'self' and 'other' determination;[11] mind is self-determined and sublates all that it confronts into its own medium (conceptual content) which abides to an internal, necessary and universal law, whilst "material objects" only enter into this activity when "they exist as a spiritual phenomenon", that is, converted into a unifying whole of organised Spirit (which is also the organisation/science of experience and phenomena). It seems that Sellars (and presumably Brassier) wishes to do away with the metaphysics of this distinction whilst maintaining a sense of the conceptual autonomy of the subject. We will analyse this topic in depth utilising Hegel's teleological theories of subjective and objective purpose,[12] as well as his account of universality (centred in the subject) and what we could call his *logical* materialism: that we are not essentially dealing with a world of arbitrary matter but with a world of logical content such as the activity of the dialectic; "there are many motivating connections of which the adventuring mind was unaware, which explained why it passed from one phase of experience to another, and yet could not be set forth in the full manner which alone would render them intelligible".[13] A dialectic which "always makes higher-order comments upon its various thought-positions, stating relations that carry us far beyond their obvious content".[14] This sentiment also suggests a moment of *buffering* or a lacuna between human experience and its higher forms of cognition (à la Kant) on the one hand and Hegel's onto-logical process of the dialectic on the other. For example, Hegel states:

> Thus in the movement of consciousness there occurs a moment of being 'in-itself' or 'being-for-us' which is not present to the consciousness comprehended in the experience itself.[15]

[11] Willem deVries, *Hege's Theory of Mental Activity*, Cornell University Press, 1988. p. 26.
[12] Ibid.
[13] The Phenomenology of Spirit, Oxford University Press, 1977, Introduction, p. 1.
[14] Findlay, J.N. The Phenomenology of Spirit, 1977. Foreword p. vi.
[15] Ibid., p. 56.

Another question which must be explored is whether 'rationality', as the ratio of norms applicable to "persons"[16] (as Sellars characterises it), or as the guiding expressions of a civilisation (Hegel), can indeed be extracted from a Nature that ostensibly houses it. The turn from causes to inferences, or non-intentionality to intentionality, in Sellars seems to suggest that it is in fact *language* that forms our conception (and applicability) of reason, and the capacity to install language into a set of norms might not be exclusively a natural phenomenon.[17] I would preliminarily suggest that this is not antithetical to Hegel in the sense that it is in fact Logic that precedes Nature in his ontology. However, Nature is in a sense necessary because it provides the *dialectical opposite* of logical succession (logical "unfolding" as Hegel called it); it is 'contingent', 'immediate', 'particular', 'actual' and so on. These latter terms must be included in Hegel's absolute idealism in order for the dialectic to contain both opposite sides, as the identity of identity and difference. Hence, I would be curious (and dubious) of how a form of linguistic logic would prevail without the contingency (natural) and opposing non-rational counterpart that sustains it. It would appear necessary that, for Being to appropriate its own Notion, it must be integrated into "an organic whole",[18] and this organic whole must include Nature as an element of it (and its overcoming) or there would be no antagonism to cause the 'self-othering' operation of the dialectic.

Finally, the most pertinent 'elephant in the room' regarding Brassier's book and the philosophy of Hegel could be seen to rest on the different usages of the term 'nihil' or *nothing*. We must ask: What does it mean for nothingness to be *unbound*? A nothingness that has no dialectical counterpart? A nothingness which is unilateral? Of course, this is directly against Hegel's account of nothingness (Willem deVries even states that there is "no such thing as pure nothingness" in Hegel) as nothingness is always attached to a specific movement between two terms, as a "disparity":[19]

[16] Brassier, Ray, Nihil Unbound, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 5.

[17] For example, could language be something so versatile that it could be 'downloaded' into machines which have no natural (or innate) relation to Newtonian physics.

[18] Hegel, G.W.F. The Phenomenology of The Spirit. Oxford University Press. 1977. p. 35. Preface.

[19] Hegel, G.W.F. The Phenomenology of The Spirit. p. 21. Oxford University Press. 1977.

> (T)he scepticism which only ever sees pure nothingness in its result and abstracts from the fact that this nothingness is specifically the nothingness of that from which it results. For it is only when it is taken as the result of that from which it emerges, that it is, in fact, the true result; in that case it is itself a determinate nothingness, one which has a content. The scepticism that ends up with the bare abstraction of nothingness or emptiness cannot get any further from there, but must wait to see whether something new comes along and what it is, in order to throw it too into the same empty abyss. But when, on the other hand, the result is conceived as it is in truth, namely, as a determinate negation, a new form has thereby immediately arisen, and in the negation the transition is made through which the progress through the complete series of forms comes about of itself.[20]

Brassier's *unbound* nothingness presumably refers to the possibility of a nothingness outside of the "correlation" (Meillassoux) between thinking and being, the clever tautological proposition that to think something outside of thought is to immediately inscribe such into a thought and hence leave no stone (or nothingness) unturned. The critique of dialectical nothingness (or correlational nothingness) is also aided by the non-correlational and non-totalisable efforts of a handful of contemporary continental philosophers such as Badiou, Laruelle and, of course, the speculative realists, and while mathematics may offer us (again) the possibility to distinguish matter, primary qualities or 'truth' from thought, as well as locating thought as an embodied 'event' irreducible to any totalising system which would presumably give it its necessity (as a science), Brassier seems to turn to both the sciences and astronomy in order to hint at a real that can never be subsumed into the 'manifest image' (first-person phenomenal consciousness) or a real that can expose the vulnerability of the so-called correlation itself (the destruction of the fabric of space-time, for example).

Hegel's descriptions of eternity, infinity and teleology (what Tom Rockmore has called a 'circular epistemology')[21] will also give us alternative meanings to Brassier's theories of extinction as an "objectification of thought" which touches the real through this very intelligibility. We will avoid talking too much about Brassier's chapters on Meillassoux as we

[20] Ibid., p. 51.

[21] Rockmore, Tom, Hegel's Circular Epistemology, Indiana University Press, 1986.

will undertake our very own research relating Meillassoux's *After Finitude* to Hegel's enterprise.

### Which Brassier?

Brassier's sceptical realism in his debut book, *Nihil Unbound*—which walks the line between eliminative materialism and a persevering engagement with the Kantian and post-Kantian legacy (at least of Wilfrid Sellars)—achieves its insights by pitting questions of the real and ideal, phenomenal and scientific, conceptual and non-conceptual, against each other, and in this sense it is very un-Hegelian. Similar to the book (or PDF) in your hand, it looks at some of those 'speculative realist figures' (such as Meillassoux) and evaluates their work in relation to that of German Idealism (perhaps more specifically Kant than Hegel in this scenario). And whilst this speculation of the 'real' opens up a dialogue for discussing the *limits* of transcendental philosophy, or the "correlation" of thinking and being (such as Meillassoux proclaims), it also affords us an opportunity to insert Hegel into this conversation and see whether his philosophy can engage with questions such as the inevitable extinction of human beings and all matter in the universe, or, the infinitely expanding (and largely non-human) nature of the cosmos, or the increasing technological determinism of our current society.

## A1: The *'In-itself'* of the *'For-us'*

There is a tripartite in Hegel's speculative theory of knowledge: (1) knowing 'for us' (the object as it appears to us); (2) the truth of the object independent from the subject (the object 'for itself'); (3) the distinction between these two possible knowledges (the 'for us' and the 'in itself') as a knowledge (dialectical knowledge), which we could also call the correspondence of knowing. But many commentators forget the fourth dimension: (4) How do these former dimensions face up to knowledge itself (as a system or total object)? In other words, does knowledge—as a system—move or develop based on these internal oscillations or

perspectives of knowing? Or, can knowledge—as a system or object—distinguish itself from what is being thought? Hegel himself insinuates this when he states that "consciousness provides its own criterion from within itself, so that the investigation becomes a comparison of consciousness with itself".[22] A comparison of consciousness with itself (i.e. consciousness as absolute system and consciousness as subjective phenomenal consciousness or 'natural' consciousness) is what interests us here (although consciousness—as that which we *participate* in—could be speculatively extended into consciousness' relation to Spirit as something irreducible to human consciousness). Regarding the former, not only is this a criterion found *within* consciousness (i.e. the distinction between knowledge (for us') and truth (in-itself)), as a *standard* by which to measure what it knows, this operation can also be seen to assail human consciousness or present-at-hand consciousness as something analysable. Now, there is also a fifth dimension (5) to this inventory; similar to number 2, we are encouraged to ask the question whether the object corresponds to its own notion. In one sense this simply means that in order for our correspondence of knowledge towards an object to have any truth, we must assume the object to *be true*, that is, that the object has its own corresponding concept or criterion of truth (otherwise what purchase does knowledge have?). Thus, we start from the 'object' side now and how it corresponds to its notion, and not the notion corresponding to an object. Yet, it also means something much more provocative, which is that—similar to someone like Plato—the object has its own ideal state in which the concept can grasp. Whether this can be described in Aristotelian terms as the 'formal cause' of an object—or even the teleological orientation found in Hegel's own musings on animals and plants—is still up for debate. However, in (Hegelian) *actuality* we cannot distinguish these two sides of knowledge and the true because the actual is always the instance of the mediation, relation or presencing of the two in consciousness. Of course, this unity has been deconstructed through thinkers such as Heidegger and Derrida, but this unity does not have to rely on human consciousness as a locus of presence; it extends 'presencing' as a capacity

[22] Hegel G. W. F. 1807/2018. The Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. T. Pinkard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 59.

for the unity of object-object relations, such as Harman's ontology and both Whiteheads and Bergson's philosophies in different ways.

So, this standard in which to measure consciousness against itself, can not only be characterised as an *immanent* operation, one that assails first-person consciousness (although sometimes glimpsed at by the "students of the moving shapes of consciousness"[23]), but also can be characterised as a capacity for consciousness to *relate to itself as an other*:

> Consciousness … is explicitly the Notion of itself. Hence it is something that goes beyond limits, and since these limits are its own, it is something that goes beyond itself.[24]

This is the *positivistic* dimension of Hegelian knowledge; that the 'in-itself' of the object independent from consciousness—and the 'for us' of natural givenness, form, content—is transformed into the *in itself for consciousness*, that is, the objects content is not merely a 'bundle of (relative) appearances' but rather an Idea (or model) that becomes more and more autonomous in that consciousness can designate its essential features and its identity (think of Husserl's work on eidetic reduction). This realisation changes everything; we now have a new, emergent conceptual criteria in which to correspond the 'object' to its essential content, and we also get to distinguish—like Husserl—the discrepancies between this new conceptual model and the 'accidental' features it may possess. This can also be described as moving from the original knowledge (for us) and truth (in itself) dyad to a new second knowledge which acknowledges this difference as something necessary and something full of additional content. Hence, the third formulation of the cognitive experience of an object is filtered through the new lens of objective knowledge (object), subjective knowledge (for us) and absolute knowledge (that this distinction is itself *presented to* knowledge and *converted* into a more astute knowledge that can discern more complex distinctions and nuances from both sides of this dyad).

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[23] Ibid.

[24] P. 51. Introduction. Hegel, G.W.F. The Phenomenology of Spirit (1977).

However, as Ray Brassier rightly points out, something else is happening on a larger scale here; there is "the content experienced by consciousness", on the one hand, and "what is in-itself for the knowledge of that consciousness", on the other. This description leans towards our fourth definition in our quintuplet of knowledge found in the first paragraph of this section; this is the operation of knowledge as a unified, formal system, measuring the subjective (phenomenal) contents against itself in order to see if such subjective accounts can be deemed as part of this culminating system. Hegel describes this process as follows:

> But it is just this necessity itself, or the origination of the new object, that presents itself to consciousness without its understanding how this happens, which proceeds for us, as it were, behind the back of consciousness. Thus in the movement of consciousness there occurs a moment of being-in-itself or being-for-us which is not present to the consciousness comprehended in the experience itself. The content, however, of what presents itself to us does exist for it; we comprehend only the formal aspect of that content, or its pure origination. For it, what has thus arisen exists only as an object; for us, it appears at the same time as movement and a process of becoming.[25]

We see again what J.N. Findlay had described in Hegel's thinking as a "higher-level", "metalogical" or "second order" comment which speculates that the content of consciousness (in and for itself) is always *extracted* regardless of the varying states of cognitive function, awareness and analysis possessed by human beings. Brassier himself states that "determinate negation is invisible from the vantage point of the experiencing consciousness. It's only the observing, scientific consciousness that perceives the determinacy of the negation going on behind the back of experiencing consciousness".[26] This "scientific consciousness" is a preliminary description for the *alternative* to the folk psychological thesis of "appearance qua appearance" and the "pragmatism that vitiates the commitment to scientific realism".[27]

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[25] Ibid., p. 56.

[26] See video link, 16.00; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9Qy50X5Gs8&t=6s.

[27] Brassier, Ray, Nihil Unbound, p. 31.

What appears to hinge on this quasi-speculative and even quasi-inhuman thesis on both the existence of self-consciousness as a *universal form* shared by cognitive creatures (yet not made explicit by such creatures) and the existence of a delay in self-consciousness itself—between the overdetermination of both the form and content it produces—whilst simultaneously *overlooking* the nothingness which constitutes and propels new emergent objects and contents of consciousness[28]—is a refined theory of *nothingness* that is itself taken from the Hegelian vocabulary. This leads Brassier to ask the following:

> Everything hinges on how we understand this form of nothingness: does it constitute the cognitive core of experience—what experience knows without knowing that it knows? Or is it rather what resists knowing, which is to ask: Is there a formlessness latent in this very form of nothingness? This is to ask to what extent form coincides with what Hegel calls 'the concept'. Recursion is an automatism, not an operator of necessity. While necessity is logical compulsion, recursion is mechanical compulsion. The science of the experience of consciousness proceeds through the formalization of nothingness, of what is not for natural consciousness.[29]

As J.N. Findlay reminds us, the "sequences of phases to be studied in the Phenomenology … involves a fine blend of the contingently historical and the logically necessary",[30] and in one sense we can add that 'form' is precisely this blend between the contingency of actual, historical, material events and the innate *logical unfolding* of any contingent event through the conditions of the syllogism, dialectical movement, sublation, the Idea's realisation or the necessity of a specific trajectory. These two conditions complement each other in Hegel's philosophy to the extent that he suggests that, regardless of what contingent event we are talking

[28] One could also say that this hidden discrepancy is found in the *contingency* of certain experiences of objects in the subject, and the *necessity* of the manifest forms produced out of such contingent experience. This would seem to relate to Hegel's points on the *necessary* logical unfolding of the conceptual in distinction to the actual contingent events which present such possible content. Historical events are contingent but the way in which they unfold are logical and necessary (the dialectic, sublation etc.).

[29] The Persistence of Form: Hegel and Psychoanalysis. Slide 16. Presented at University of Brighton, College of Arts and Humanities on 20 February 2017.

[30] Foreword, Findlay, J.N. The Phenomenology of Spirit. 1977.

about, it is limited by its actuality (not some hypothetical event of "fancy and opinion"[31]) and the way in which this contingent, actual event' must—by necessity—have "successive phases which bring out what is logically implicit in its earlier phases".[32]

However, Hegel's nothingness appears as a determination correlated to a specific object (hence a *specific nothingness*); what is negated as its primitive or untrue stage is only ever recalled or represented in the new, developed object itself and cannot be discerned as either a *manifest process itself* or a process 'in-itself'. This is the invisibility of negation, similar to the more general account of productive (or constitutive) nothingness that Hegel gives to the "forms of unreal consciousness" (or "error"), which is itself a road to truth, as the "completion of a series".[33] This nothingness may "manifest itself in due course"[34] but always through the revised identity of something or other (and why must we wait for this nothingness to incarnate itself?). Hegel believes this nothingness to always have "content" but, importantly, a content that is synonymous with a "new form".[35]

In this sense I would opt for the first of Brassier's options regarding nothingness, that it "constitutes the cognitive core of experience—what experience knows without knowing that it knows", as opposed to something which "resists knowing". It would seem, at least in the above example I have outlined, that we have a *temporal problem* regarding *negation's subtraction of content into a new content*. I have outlined this in a chapter included in this book called 'Politics of the Absolute' in order to avoid digressing too much in this chapter on Hegel and Brassier. However, due to Hegel's formulation of *sublation* (which I have contended in my chapter on Harman), any trace of negation is itself integrated into the *result of* that negation (or the new, revised object of consciousness); hence, any "resistance" of knowing is itself dialectically inscribed into a product or

[31] Hegel, we know, did not desire to step out of his own time and his own thought-situation. To seek to transcend one's time is only, he says, to venture into the 'soft element' of fancy and opinion. p. vii Phenomenology of Spirit, 1977.

[32] Ibid., p. vii.

[33] Introduction, p. 50, Hegel, The Phenomenology of Spirit, 1977.

[34] Ibid., p. 51.

[35] Ibid., p. 51.

content of this resistance which emerges subsequently as a result of this resistance.

It is at this point where the nothingness of Hegelian philosophy is recharacterised as a "blind spot" in geists' (Spirits') own internal processing, as its "formal unconscious".[36] However, before we entertain this trajectory, we must acknowledge that Hegel's nothingness (or non-being) is not traditionally described as an inability to successfully determine its own content, or, as Rebecca Comay suggests, it is not primarily understood that "the ultimate obstacles to reason are those generated by reason".[37] Why? Because Hegel's account of the relationship between being and nothingness rely on each other to such an extent that there is always a "being of nothingness" as well as the nothingness of being which acts as determinate negation. In other words, nothingness is the dialectical condition of possibility for content to emerge in the first place (as well as the *being of* nothingness) and not its obstacle. Let us quickly see how nothingness is intrinsically utilised in Hegel's philosophy in at least five dimensions. I will start with a quote from Hegel in order to reinforce my claims:

> 1. Difference;
>
> *Nothing* is usually opposed to *something*; but the being of *something* is already determinate and is distinguished from another *something*; and so therefore the nothing which is opposed to the something is also the nothing of a particular something, a determinate nothing.[38]

Firstly, we have a *nothingness* associated with *distinction* both inside and outside the object. If we accept Hegel's thesis that every *determinate* entity is simultaneously "self-othering" itself, producing qualities and characteristics not intrinsically possessed by that object (a non-determinate object being something that lacks any qualities and could be associated

[36] The Persistence of Form: Hegel and Psychoanalysis. Slide 17. Presented at University of Brighton, College of Arts and Humanities on 20 February 2017.

[37] Rebecca Comay 'Resistance and Repetition'. Brill. 2015 pp. 261–262.

[38] Instead of spending hours poring over Hegel's Science of Logic in order to find references, I have decided to use Marxists.org to find certain passages that I thought would aid this section. See link here for Hegel's passages on Being, Non-Being and Becoming; Section 135 https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hl/hl083.htm.

with the empty, static, formal tautologies of mathematics, algebra or analytical statements), then, subsequently, every specific determinate object is *negotiating* its own *singular* nothingness or negation which will subsequently provide the object with the capacity to move beyond itself (as bare self-identity) and develop itself into a level of identity which takes into account the first simple identity (being qua being identity) and the second dialectical identity (i.e. being and its reconciliation of its other). Furthermore, this negotiation with negation (or non-being) also simultaneously *distinguishes the object from any other object*; it is the object's own 'private' journey with respect to *what it is not*. In Allen Porter's words:

> For instance, in terms of quality: being as quality (such as color) is the immediate identity of a being with its qualitative determination—for example, something's being red indeed implies its relational determination vis-a-vis all the other colors that it is not (i.e., being red as opposed to blue, or yellow, etc.), but these relational determinations remain merely implicit in quality, in which the something is immediately identical to its particular qualitative determination (here, being red). This means the relational determination, by negativity or difference (again, red is not blue or yellow or…), remains implicit in the quality qua immediate identity of being with its determination—and shows up outside of it, as the other to which it can only be (at this stage) explicitly or in-itself related to by a passing-over-into or becoming. That means, for example: something is red, and in order to express its qualitative relation to an other determination (like being yellow), at this stage (because it is immediately identified with its determination, so that others show up outside it as others) that can only be done by its becoming what it is not, by becoming what is for it, as it is in-itself, (an) other.[39]

> 2. Determination;
>
> Thus in God himself, quality (energy, creation, power, and so forth), essentially involves the determination of the negative-they are the producing of an other.[40]

[39] Porter, Allen, The Syllogism in Hegel's Logic, https://www.academia.edu/8931115/The_Syllogism_In_Hegels_Logic.

[40] https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hl/hl083.htm Section 138.

Or

> Being and non-being are the same, therefore it is the same whether this house is or is not, whether these hundred dollars are part of my fortune or not. This inference from, or application of, the proposition completely alters its meaning. The proposition contains the pure abstractions of being and nothing; but the application converts them into a determinate being and a determinate nothing.[41]

In this case, we have a nothingness which shares the same characteristics of the first (i.e. distinction, self-othering) but is primarily defined as the *motor* which drives this self-othering, that is, Beings relation to Nothing, which it extrapolates but cannot ever fully find or exhaust. Hence, a type of *subtraction* of *being qua being* is put into motion whereby the object is propelled into a nothingness (*finitude*, for example) which will give the once self-subsistent or hypothetical being an *actual* trajectory full of various different (and antagonistic/contradictory) determinations and hence qualities. Let us not be misunderstood here; nothingness is not the gap between being and its qualities because for any being to 'be' it must always already have qualities. Instead, nothingness is always already in the heart of the object as its *capacity to exist* and hence its capacity to be other than its self-contained pseudo-stasis/identity.

3. Becoming;
   In being, the relation to non-being is contained through becoming[42]

The relation of 'no' to 'nothing', or 'non' in 'non-being' presupposes an inextricability that Hegel enjoys *trying* to think on their own independent terms but nevertheless sees their function as co-implicated terms. We can already see this in the first two dimensions of nothingness I have described, yet here I wish to emphasise—not the capacity for distinction or determination—but movement *tout court*. A type of *natural becoming* perhaps, which insists that for nothing *to become* there must be a *being* to

[41] Ibid., section 140.
[42] Ibid., Section 135.

that nothing, and for being to become there must be a nothing which gives being its transformative capacity. As Hegel himself states, there must be a *being of* becoming since "from nothing only nothing becomes", and Hegel is himself critical of any *dogmatic* account of nothing that "does not see the being of this nothing" and states that this type of dogmatic account is in fact "opposed to becoming".[43]

> *4. Essence* (as contradiction);
>
> It would not be difficult to demonstrate this unity of being and nothing in every example, in every actual thing or thought. The same must be said of being and nothing, as was said above about immediacy and mediation (which latter contains a reference to an other, and hence to negation), that nowhere in heaven or on earth is there anything which does not contain within itself both being and nothing.[44]

I think one can define at least three modes of contradiction in Hegel's project:

1. The notion that thought uses the power of the negative whilst always providing nothingness with a *content* (i.e. a content *opposed to* pure nothingness). Hegel also reverses this notion; Being can never be fully positive and must contain its negation within it.
2. The positive contradiction that emerges through affirming both being and non-being, as a movement from identity to its opposite. For example, for a man to both be bald and not bald, this would suggest a contradiction. But Hegel's point is that the actual determination of the becoming of hair (in whatever state) includes both notions simultaneously (to simplify, finitude is the co-implication of both being and non-being simultaneously). Hence, Hegel's contradictions are both absolute truths and driving forces of any *being of* an entity a priori. In this sense, contradiction is the motor for existence.
3. Consciousness attains its absolute status through processing *both* the oppositions of the concept (contradiction) *and* the *concepts themselves*,

[43] Ibid., Section 135.
[44] Ibid., Section 138.

which may appear "mutually indifferent and mutually exclusive"[45] to the former. One could say that the oppositional content (of difference) *processed by consciousness* is in contradiction to the concepts themselves (as "mutually indifferent and mutually exclusive") yet—as we know—this difference or contradiction is itself sublated in "self consciousness" or the "absolute knowledge" which contains both. The capacity for consciousness to contain these conceptual differences and opposites within itself as a new self-subsistent *unity* has an absolute, autonomous quality to it in that it "is not a relation to something external". What does this mean? Purportedly, we can view the entirety of consciousness (and perhaps what is independent from consciousness[46]) as constituted through relations of opposition, difference and identity (qua determinate negation). And it would seem that the dimensions of the negative and the positive lack any final distinction or duality:

> (T)he positive is positedness as reflected into likeness to itself, positedness that is not a relation to an other, a subsistence, therefore, in so far as positedness is sublated and excluded.

This passage describes the autonomous, self-determining nature of consciousness which aids its absolute characterisation (self-relating), that is, its approach is a correspondence to its own identity (a sublation and not a sincere encounter with Otherness). However:

> But with this, the positive makes itself into the relation of a non-being—into a positedness.

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[45] https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hl/hl431.htm (Section 931).

[46] The more naturalist-speculative account may go something like this: Cognition putatively contains both the determination of reflection and "its opposite determination" (i.e. causal determination). But it also excludes the external causal dimension through virtue of this new, 'sublated' form of cognition that implies both modes; it can reflect upon causation and make its content interior or commensurate with consciousness. But also, it can conceptualise external causality as providing all the basic content it needs for consciousness. Moreover, when this new absolute consciousness is further analysed, as itself, it too must momentarily suspend itself or oppose itself as identity; it must negate itself as soon as it is posited, but this negative reflection is then aimed at itself ad infinitum (self-relating negativity).

In other words, the determination that makes this positing possible still works on the basis of a further determining (and hence positing something beyond the initial identity posited). This of course contains the negation necessary for reflection to be other than what it reflects upon. Yet this negation is *overlooked* as it is sublated into a further identity. However:

> It is thus the contradiction that, in positing identity with itself by excluding the negative, it makes itself into the negative of what it excludes from itself, that is, makes itself into its opposite. This, as excluded, is posited as free from that which excludes it, and therefore as reflected into itself and as itself exclusive. The exclusive reflection is thus a positing of the positive as excluding its opposite, so that this positing is immediately the positing of its opposite which it excludes.

Hegel seems to think that—although the absolute is secured and the identity of both *identity and difference* is salvaged—the operation of identity attempts to exclude the negativity that aids it. In other words, the more and more identity develops its notion, the more and more it relates to characteristics in itself and not some equivalent or opposing force/determination. But in doing so it starts to take responsibility over its development (i.e. it "makes itself into the negative of what it excludes from itself"). This new form of self-identity (not as *opposed* to some abstract opposition or difference (outside) but rather as becoming precisely what it excludes(simulacrum)) is an entirely new form of determination (assimilation). In brief, to negate a negation is to possess the latter in some way without actually confronting it. It is identity qua exclusion.

Before this new operation occurs, however, we must look at the initial contradiction of simultaneously negating whilst positing (i.e. reflection). Hence, we move into our fifth dimension of contradiction:

> 5. Reflection
>
> Of course, since we are speaking here of a particular actual something, those determinations are no longer present in it in the complete untruth in which they are as being and nothing; they are in a more developed determination, and are grasped, for example, as positive and negative, the former being posited, reflected being, the latter posited, reflected nothing. Of course reflection can be recharacterized as determination (nothingness)

> and the being of nothingness as the content of reflection, and the identity of reflection as the suspension or acknowledgement of nothingness and being as identifiable in all things, and hence the circle repeats.[47]

Not only is being and nothing necessary for the essence of every "thing" or "thought"; it is also *identified* as being so. Hegel has built up his novel position in a certain way to show that the operation of the dialectic of being and non-being in any entity or thought is identical to the operation of *identifying* that object (i.e. in identification, one is reflecting upon (or sublating) a prior object or thought and identifying its *difference to the subject* and the difference *between the object 'in-itself' and the object 'for us'* as a newly revised object). These operations are already speculatively possessed by the object prior to thought: the movement between the initial and putative self-identical object with its auto-activated determinate negation.

## A2: Assimilation or Resistance: Conceptual or Non-Conceptual Negation

To conclude this impossibly brief study of the five Hegelian dimensions of contradiction, I argue that nothingness (or non-being) can never be actually (in existence) distinguished or hypostatised from being, nor can the *operation of* negation ever be seen as a resistance or residue of the thing which it is negating (or the *content of* negation itself). This rests on the co-implication of *difference* as an *opposition* (of being and non-being) that is determinate or can be determined in human thought. It also rests on the notion that the negation of content simultaneously *produces content* and that such a negation includes all the content of what it is negating (sublation). Yet, this form of *assimilation* works on the presumption that *what it excludes it simultaneously becomes*. This appears to me to be a type of unilateral procedure in that it finds identity in *contradistinction*. Or to dramatise this procedure further; identity mimics or clones what it is not simply by refusing it. And while we acknowledge that refusal is a type of determination and a form of identity, it is not, however, a

[47] Hegel, G.W.F, The Science of Logic. See section Being, Becoming, Nothing.

thorough or democratic form of sublation. It integrates otherness through a type of bas-relief; it only imprints otherness upon *its own material* (self-related negativity) and does not infiltrate the material of the other.

The concern I have sketched above would be my inclined investigation into the problem of the overdetermination of absolute consciousness within Hegelian philosophy. It would be concerned with the act of assimilation (similar in some respects to Baudrillard) yet acting as an alternative to the plethora of anti-Hegelians in the twentieth century that wished to describe a positive (substantial) residue "jamming" the operation of total determinate negation without remainder (Heidegger, Levinas, Foucault, Deleuze). My formulation does not seem to gravitate around some*thing* which avoids sublation, but rather something *in the act of sublation itself* which seems to overlook something for its own benefit. There could be merit in formulating an Other which resists the overdetermination of content (Levinas), however, if we were to postulate this other as resisting sublation, this other would be *substantiated* as resisting sublation and hence would undergo—according to the law of Hegelian ontology—its own desubstantialisation or self-othering process (and possibly its own forms of sublation if postulated independently from absolute knowing). Hence, there must be something inherent to the "machine"[48] of Spirit itself that is potentially overlooked and does not lie outside of being, non-being, difference and identity. In Zizek's words:

> Hegel's unconscious is the unconscious of self-consciousness itself, its own necessary non-transparency, the necessary overlooking of its own form ("das Formelle") in the content it confronts.[49]

Ray Brassier riffs off this passage and interprets this as follows:

> (A) resistance to formalization in and through form and in this sense the Phenomenology can be read as charting self-consciousness's repeated

[48] Zizek, Slavoj, Less Than Nothing, Verso, 2012. p. 484.
[49] Ibid., p. 485.

> attempts to successfully sublate (which is to say formalize) the content of its experience.[50]

There is a twofold characterisation of what stymies or overlooks the progress of sublation at this point and it is important to note: (1) the theory that there is an 'overlooked' aspect of sublation that can itself be *substantialised* as "reasons other",[51] which seems to come in the form of **repetition** (note: a repetition that can be *distinguished from the content that it repeats*)—this seems to be the camp of Rebecca Comay, partially Zizek and Brassier himself; (2) the notion that sublations own automatic procedure operates (successfully) precisely by overlooking specific instances, particularities or underlying processes (sublation as assimilation), yet *what* is overlooked is simply a blind spot in the operation itself and is not positivised in some real external, resistant form—this seems to be a satisfactory account in my opinion precisely because it refuses to substantialise some underlying positive existence of an operation exempt from (and independent from) determinate negation (as I have argued above).

Zizek seems to hang somewhere in between these two opinions, as he never explicitly describes repetition in-itself but only the failures discerned in sublation itself (from the inside as it were):

> [….] what eludes Hegel (or what he would have dismissed as trifling or accidental) is overdetermination: in the Hegelian dialectical process, negativity is always radical or radicalized, and consistent -Hegel never considers the option of a negation that fails, so that something is just half-negated and continues to lead a subterranean existence (or, rather, insistence). He never considers a constellation in which a new spiritual principle continues to coexist with the old one in an inconsistent totality, or in which a moment condenses (verdichten) a multiplicity of associative causal chains, so that its explicit "obvious" meaning is there to conceal the true repressed one.[52]

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[50] The Persistence of Form: Hegel and Psychoanalysis. Slide 18. Presented at University of Brighton, College of Arts and Humanities on 20 February 2017.

[51] Ibid., slide 20.

[52] Zizek, Slavoj, Less Than Nothing, Verso, 2012. p. 487.

Similar to Lacan, this distinction—between repetition and determinate negation (content), between conceptual and non-conceptual determination—is only postulated as a *heuristic* device and is not elaborated upon as something that itself contains its own private or independent capacities or essence. Brassier himself notices this when he states:

> If we have a more generous reading of Hegel, we see that sublation works by not working, it integrates the failure of determinately negating something *within itself*, so that this failure is constitutive of the workings of formalisation.[53]

It is interesting to note that this "failure" is precisely analogous to Hegelian "negation" in that it is not simply seen as a "positive negation" but a negation which *succeeds in its failure*. This last definition is subtly different because it *acknowledges failure primarily and then transforms it into a positive feature* as opposed to immediately (or simultaneously) transforming failure into a success because of what negation constitutes or affords. But of course, we can add the Hegelian caveat and suggest that if "failure is constitutive of the workings of formalisation", then the term "failure" must be revised in this context. It is precisely Hegel's account of subject and object in his Phenomenology which charts the *successive failures* of various naive (or natural) perceptual and conceptual categories, and it is this method, along with designating essence and identity qua desubstantialisation and contradiction, which puts into question the very status of failure outside of dialectical (co-implicated) terms.

## A3: The Unconscious as Material or Formal

So, if we accept this reading, the question then is: To what *domain* should this dialectical *success of failure* be designated? Zizek initially describes the underbelly or blind spot of this new characterisation of sublation (as a form of extrapolation) to be the *unconscious of form*—not the inverse or

[53] The Persistence of Form: Hegel and Psychoanalysis. Presented at University of Brighton, College of Arts and Humanities on 20 February 2017 (my italics).

formlessness of form, but the abundance of it. It is "the form of enunciation invisible in the enunciated content". Zizek continues, "the unconscious is the universal form of particular content". In one sense, this cannot be associated with the traditional psychoanalytic unconscious, whether as the desires, fluxes and libidinal flows *unrestrained by form* or the theatre of production in excess of form. It is rather the enhanced Kantian monster that devours all in its systemic web, whose 'conditions of possibility' extend beyond the unity of apperception and index every possible difference in form and content. It is the waking realisation that even your ostensibly submerged dreams do not require the dream work to give them form and content but are already intrinsically expressing their "universal sense (form) within particular content". In this sense it is a truly philosophical or logical enterprise. Yet, regarding agency and free will, the *neurosis of conceptual determination* prefigures a psychological remit. This is precisely what Mladen Dolar suggests when he states:

> The philosophical illusion is structural, it has its basis in the unconscious itself as effacement.[54]

It seems pertinent at this stage to acknowledge a renaissance of the term *speculative* that is being implied in this discourse on sublation. We move from a speculation upon a realism outside or independent of consciousness (outside the "correlation"), to a traditionally German Idealist characterisation that speculates upon additional or implicit mechanisms or powers *within consciousness itself* (e.g. the legacy of 'intellectual intuition' found in Descartes, Kant, Fichte and others). One should not reduce Hegel's speculative enterprise to this operation of *consciousness upon itself*, however; Hegel's speculative attitude skips between the role of consciousness as a whole, to the role of consciousness as acquiring retrospective, ordering criteria, to his teleological turn and his musings on the 'ideal' self-determination of plants and animals.

Returning to the seemingly complicit domains of Hegelian sublation and psychoanalysis, the question—as Brassier himself suggests—is whether we adopt this overdetermination as the unconscious of Hegelian

[54] Ibid., Slide 26.

self-consciousness or the unconscious of psychology, or, in other words, whether we associate this problem as one of *formal* unconscious (Hegel) or *material* unconscious (conventional psychoanalytic theory). Zizek's seems to provocatively integrate both denotations together. For example, in this passage:

> […] pure repetition (in contrast to repetition as idealizing sublation) is sustained precisely by its impurity, by the persistence of a contingent "pathological" element to which the movement of repetition gets and remains stuck. The key question is thus: can Hegel think the "indivisible remainder" generated by every move of idealization or sublation? Before concluding too quickly that he cannot, we should bear in mind that, at its most radical, the Lacanian object a (the name of this "indivisible remainder") is not a substantial element disturbing the formal mechanism of symbolization, but a purely formal curvature of symbolization itself.

As we can see, the distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual (material) repetition is invoked here whilst also acceding that its effect is "purely formal".

The question of "*pure* repetition" is quickly undermined by its purely *formal* result, yet this undermining still persists, and if it can be "pure", we must avoid the "substantial element" of this purity. But how would we do this? Perhaps by suggesting that the *irreducible ideal element* given to absolute self-consciousness (its irreducibility to any one object—whether micro or macro) also possesses an irreducible power which stops it *exhausting itself* (reducing itself) as in the ouroboros eating its own tail. What stops this self-totalisation *whilst remaining a totality* is that, although the particular is in the universal (and vice versa), they nevertheless cannot completely present each of themselves through the other. A particularity can only *participate* in the universal, it can only *present the particularity of universality* (or the universality of every particular) but it cannot depict or contain universality itself in any conglomerate sense (as this would require more than one particular instance). If particularity could do that, then there would be no particularity but only a kind of eternal universality without distinctions. Similarly, if universality could be properly accounted for (and not just simply expressed) in a particular instance, then there

would be no *becoming* nor an ontology of contradictory essence (i.e. the particular instance would be self-same, self-identical; it would contain itself and therefore would not be negotiating otherness or nothingness).

In the act of fixation (or neurosis), it is not repetition that stymies conceptuality, but rather it is a phenomenon whereby the particularity of the instance is inclined to think of itself as the universality of all content and not simply the singular expression of the universal. Of course, it cannot do this (for the reasons sketched out above), but the psychoanalytic patient who believes all meaning to be provided or apparent within the corpse of his wife, the phallic door knob, the anticipation of death, which is revisited again and again (or simply on repeat as the absolute appearance of Spirit), momentarily stops the irreducibility of the particular to the universal (and vice versa) and freezes time and any further determination of content. The absolute is reducible to the particular, but the effect is one of stasis, fixation, narcissus staring at his own reflection. Encounters with difference are closed off similar to how Hegel's absolute consciousness "excludes" additional or peripheral content as part of its *self-referential* nature. In other words, the element getting in the way of conceptual sublation is not material resistance but, in a sense, occurs *when sublation works too well*; nothing is overlooked in the pathological instance, and all movement is halted for the eternity or full exhaustion of content with its process, or the exhaustion of the universal in the particular. In this sense, the fixation is not indifference (the indifference of the repetition independent from what is represented) but total enthrallment where the movement cannot be separated from the content because the content is universal and absolutely meaningful and hence does not require temporality as a future-oriented capacity to identify itself or reconcile itself with something other to what it is (that something outside of the fixation which the patient is necessarily indifferent to).

If we take a passage from Mladen Dolar—such as, " (H)owever far and wide we seek a minimal element, we never arrive at one minimal and indivisible, but rather at the division as irreducible"[55]—we see that this negation in the heart of the object (as Subject)—as opposed to simply void—can be recharacterised as the *impossibility of reducing one to the*

[55] Ibid., slide 29.

*other* (atom and void); it is both, just as universality and particularity are exhibited in both. Hence, if reducibility is impossible for Dolar, the *attempt at reducibility* discussed above may cause a type of fixation of transparency as opposed to the unfolding of self-relating negativity (or simply determinate negation).

If we take Dolar's and Brassier's notion of the unconscious as "not a substance, not some kind of entity whose ontological status has to be adjudicated",[56] then we can see that it's splits, fissures, its own "effacement" and so on, which perpetually postpones any self-identification, unity or transparency, is necessarily against any form of *fixation* that attempts to totalise being (or essence) with appearance or concept. Yet this is precisely what happens in the neurotic act; every colour, object, weather condition, word and so on is caught in the centrifugal operation that returns itself to the centre of some traumatic or sexual instinct or object. There is no alterity outside or beyond the object or instinct of fixation, every blade of grass is ripe with its immediate identification with the kernel of the initial trauma. In other words, the psychological or unconscious fixation, which is associated with a kind of 'non-idealised' repetition (material or non-conceptual repetition), is in fact a purely formal fixation concerning the *subsumption* of all processes of determinate negation (opposition, antagonism, difference, subtraction etc.) into one content (and perhaps even one form). It is the sublation of sublation itself. This is obviously opposed to Zizek's, Dolar's and Brassier's characterisation of fixation as an

> (I)mpurity … the persistence of a contingent "pathological" element to which the movement of repetition gets and remains stuck.[57]

Or as:

> The repetition which is constitutive of the material unconscious" which acts as "a fixation or stuckness on particularity.[58]

[56] The Persistence of Form: Hegel and Psychoanalysis. Presented at University of Brighton, College of Arts and Humanities on 20 February 2017.

[57] Zizek, Slavoj, Less Than Nothing, Verso, 2012. p. 500.

[58] The Persistence of Form: Hegel and Psychoanalysis. Presented at University of Brighton, College of Arts and Humanities on 20 February 2017.

We are arguing that this "stuckness on particularity" is a *subsumption par excellence*[59] (the *sublation of* sublation) and not an operation which can hypostatise some substantial barrier, resistance or submerged process (material repetition) which would somehow (*must* somehow) remain exempt from symbolisation/the conceptual. The emphasis on the *psychological* domain regarding this theme of subsumption complements the notion (and the Hegelian notion) that the very *reflection of* this process (or the instantiation of the compulsion in a particular subject) does not necessarily move us beyond the repetition or subsumption but rather coincides the 'being -in-itself' of Hegel's universalism with the 'being-in-and-for-itself' of that universalism (or that eternity) within consciousness and the considered moment. It is a *reflection into itself* ad infinitum like Narcissus and not a *revision* ad infinitum like dialectics. Similarly to Nietzsche's (neurotic) thesis, if one coincides the particular, actual moment of joy (as fixation) and ostensibly then affirms every and all moments prior and subsequent to that one moment due to such moments being a *condition* for the one joyous moment, then we are not in fact *moving beyond* this state of ecstasy or stoic affirmation; nothing has emerged as a differential element which then must be re-subsumed (ad infinitum) but, rather, eternity is hypostatised as an extended fixation of the present (in which it contains all other moments as its condition).

It is precisely because—in Hegel—every self-othering process, every contradiction as essence, is simultaneously a division *and* an engine (a fission and a fusion) that we cannot conceive of one without the other or such operations as independent terms (such as material repetition and conceptual negation). *However*, we can push fission and fusion into varying degrees regarding each other. Fixation is a phenomenon that attempts to constantly re-*fuse fission*; it subsumes the fission that would propel both into a differential and a developed (more complex) scenario. In one sense, fixation does this by making what appears as immediate and simple

[59] Surely there can be individual moments of particularity as subsumption; subsumption is a subjective operation which equates universality to particularity without any remainder (without further negation) and instead abides by the law of fixation; self-identification with all that is qua the particular trauma. This reminds me of Nietzsche's thesis that if one "says yes to one joy" then one is saying yes to all the moments that "are chained and entwined" with the existence of this one moment.

(self-identical) into a harbinger for all sorts of contingencies outside it; the one simple act of infidelity can be replayed over and over in the head of the jealous husband or wife and all sorts of new scenarios can be added to this initial act. Yet it is the initial *non-identical identity* (the trauma of something that cannot be simply identified but rather displaced, repressed etc.) that is identified (or reconciled) by refusing to move away from this originary object, act or impulse or by sublating any prior or subsequent act into this self-dividing originary one. In a sense, Hegel's ontology is adequately exemplified here, yet the act of identification that encourages reconciliation (developmental sublation of differences) is substituted for a *non-developmental* subsumption whereby the stages of the idea are not themselves transforming through the trajectory or criteria of truth (the stages of the Idea in Hegelian teleology) but are stuck within the *affectivity* of the subject who contradicts him/herself by secretly desiring (or possessing) the very trauma that it wishes to do away with. In this sense, the universality of particularity—and vice versa—is achieved but at the expense of the subject provoking this totalisation through fixation and a type of stasis of negation (the infiltration of negation back into an originary identification; trauma), and this is opposed to Hegel's co-incidence of particularity and universality in the absolute knowledge of the Subject, which relies on the conceptual/philosophical achievements of cognition to track the co-implication of essence and appearance as the ongoing integration of nothing (negation) which infiltrates the *particular act of exclusion with an exclusive content*.

What is interesting to note, in both the cases laid out by Dolar, Zizek and Brassier, and my own case, is that "negation produces something that it cannot itself negate. There is a persistence of negativity in the very failure of negativity".[60] For example, in fixation, the negatives always revolve around something that—no matter how much you negate (trauma)—cannot itself be fully negated (in order to move into something else) but instead becomes infiltrated into the identity of the negative as originary traumatic object. In other words, the ongoing negations of the neurotic only mask (or add to) the originary object and do not succeed in negating

[60] The Persistence of Form: Hegel and Psychoanalysis. Presented at University of Brighton, College of Arts and Humanities on 20 February 2017. Slide 30.

it. While, on the side of material repetition, there is the acknowledgement of the positive existence of a material that cannot itself be negated in the act of negation.

A result of my own wager on the possibility of sublation's own subsumption in moments of psychological "fixity" is the proposition that not all contradictions (as trauma, for example) determine or propel *new* ones. In other words, contradiction (as essence) is not always the locus of determination or generation of *the other* but also the repetition and fixation of what is *same in every other* (e.g. the wound of the neurotic or psychotic that is consistent throughout its finite existence). The result of the Dolarian-Zizekian and Brassierian *materialist* account is an anti-Hegelian conclusion which suggests that contradiction (as the essence of all that exists) *cannot itself be thought*, that is, it is not a determinate contradiction that is identical with the 'corresponding' operation reflected in thought.[61] Brassier states "contradiction then has both a formal and material aspect. In other words there's a contradiction at the level of conceptual possibility, but if there are blockages and impasses at the level of the unconscious what you have are *material impossibilities*".[62]

According to Zizek (at least), if the *epistemological* limit (of accessing the 'in-itself' or accessing self-identical being) is turned into an *ontological* limit (essence as contradiction), then we can still "interfere" with this "impossibility" on an *immanent* level (as opposed to resigning ourselves to the awe of some hypostatised noumenal entity). We do this by "intervening with the symbolic into the Real, because the Real is not external reality-in-itself, but a crack in the symbolic, so one can intervene with an act which re-configures the field and thus transforms its immanent point of impossibility".[63]

Yet does this achieve the resistance of the material to the conceptual that was first intended in the formulation of material repetition? I think not. It desubstantialises any externality or independent reality into a discrepancy within the realm of symbolic representation. But there is already

[61] As Brassier himself admits, "Hegel believes that contradiction exerts a determining power; it can be conceptualised (determinately conceptualised)." Ibid.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Zizek, Slavoj, Less Than Nothing, Verso, 2012. p. 477.

a discrepancy in the realm of conceptual, formal and symbolic representation in Hegel that he qualifies successfully (i.e. *representation itself* shows the contradiction inherent in being and appearance—or essence and appearance—amongst other things).

The nub of Brassier's theoretical import stops here at this point of his presentation[64] and moves onto more political matters.[65] Other than the *speculative* hypothesis of founding an intrinsic formal (or material) aspect of overdetermination (or resistance) which alludes the act of first person phenomenological experience, as well as *speculatively* characterising consciousness as its own autonomous (self-relating) post-subjective network (i.e. the 'in-itself' of the 'for itself'), what appears salient in this project is an engagement with the conceptual and the material without recourse to any naturalistic notions of 'substance', 'natural kinds', natural teleology, biologically reducible claims to the orientation of thinking (organicism) and so on. We will now look into the implications of this refusal to naturalise consciousness, since Hegel himself found Nature to be a necessary dialectical form of reason (i.e. as its other) whereby "nature is not merely external in relation to the idea, but the externality which *constitutes the determination in which nature as nature exists*".[66] This is not to *deify* Nature in any way but simply to acknowledge the part it plays in "externalising the concept so to have the appearance of an indifferent subsistence and isolation in regards to each other".[67] Hence, the next section will be a contrasting analysis of Hegel's organicist rationalism[68] against Brassier's neo-rationalism.

What I wish to add regarding Brassier's presentation, entitled *The Persistence of Form: Hegel and Psychoanalysis*, is that it does a great job of showing its audience a trajectory traced from the non-relational

[64] The Persistence of Form: Hegel and Psychoanalysis. Presented at University of Brighton, College of Arts and Humanities on 20 February 2017.

[65] See the following paragraph in this chapter.

[66] Section 192. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/na/nature.htm.

[67] Ibid., 193.

[68] This will have to be carefully qualified because although Hegel's anti-Aristotelian successors wish to rid him of any positive theory of self-identical essences in Nature and wish to qualify his theory of negation as solely conceptual, the rise of the organism in Hegel—as the reconciliation of external purposelessness and internal, ideal teleology—is indispensable in his theory of the relation between Spirit and Nature.

(absolute) element found in determinative negation's irreducibility to itself (exacerbated in thinkers such as Dolar and Zizek) to both the social non-relation (Althusser) and the resistance to fully relational transparency and giveness in the unconscious (in Lacan for instance). This deductive[69] explication of non-relation is characterised as a "resistance" for Brassier (non-conceptual, material, blockage, pure repetition etc.), and it is not unlike the non-relational aspect of Harman's 'real object' which resists (somewhat passively perhaps) any purely relational subsumption (what Harman terms 'withdrawal"). This is at least one thing that relates both speculative realists to one another.[70]

## B1: Natural Rationalism or Neo-Rationalism?

### Introduction

Ray Brassier's appraisal of Wilfried Sellars' relative autonomy of the manifest image (or at least the incorrigibility of the manifest with the scientific image), as well as Brassier's emphasis on the Hegelian formal unconscious as an *in-itself of the for itself* distinct from the immediate and content-less becomings of Nature,[71] all point to a dissatisfaction starting with natural (teleological) processes and then superimposing intentions, beliefs and conceptual content as if natural outcomes of such initial activity. In fact, the manifest image succeeds through *denying* ceaseless (indifferent?) becoming in nature and simple teleological criteria, similar to Nitezsche's claim that one can only survive the harsh truth of reality through illusion ("the lie – and not the truth – is divine!"[72]).

[69] Deductive in the sense of deducing what non-relationality is not (in contra-distinction, for example).

[70] This is also connected to both Brassier's and Harman's emphasis on unilateral or asymmetrical relationality contra the reciprocity epitomised in "correlationism", where thinking and being are interchangeable and co-implicated in many ways.

[71] This 'in itself' of the 'for itself' is usually characterised as an autonomous thinking activity generated through itself; its own determinations; the determinate becoming of the nothingness it initially starts with (nothingness as the impossibility of knowing anything in advance of the process of knowing).

[72] Nietzsche, F. (1968) The Will to Power, ed. and tr. W. Kaufman (New York: Vintage).

Brassier's talk on 'The Persistence of Form', in Hegel, complements this denaturalisation by implying that the hypostatisation (or substantialisation) of some material (nature?) resisting consciousness is found to be inadequate through the inevitability that all matter is simultaneously "pulverised"[73] into form and content through Hegel. The positing of any *formlessness* (or resistance to form) is always inscribed into form for Hegel (as a form of conscious determination).

An aspect of this conclusion is that, what 'resists' conceptual inscription in cognitive consciousness is its very operation (it is the *success of* its failure). This leaves Nature, and the naive realism of independent substance/s, as unable to *account* for both neurological, phenomenal and Hegelian cognitive functioning and orientation. Even Brassier's account of Nietzchean 'eternal recurrence'[74] is found to reside, not in an 'in-itself' of independent becoming, which is extended to the realm of human thought, but rather in the human conscious capacity to 'evaluate' becoming into positive and negative registers (and subsequently to attempt transcending the latter by affirming it through the former).[75] In this regard, nature is eternally displaced as something which does not possess its own inherently transformative power and hence becomes a nature "indifferent to the values and meanings … we drape over it in order to make it more hospitable".[76] The "correlationist" hypothesis found in Nietzsche's eternal recurrence thesis (the inextricability of being and thinking/evaluation), as well as his unavowed Hegelian inclination to use 'evaluation' as a *conditional* act founded on the subject, which retrospectively *absolutises* all becoming as necessitated upon Joy, leaves us dubious as to whether there in fact exists any defining characteristic or intrinsic principle in nature made explicit in the manifest and conceptual realm.

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[73] See Ray Brassier's presentation entitled The Persistence of Form: Hegel and Psychoanalysis. Slide 16. Presented at University of Brighton, College of Arts and Humanities on 20 February 2017. See video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyGji40HNQw.

[74] See Chap. 7: The Truth of Extinction in Nihil Unbound for Brassier's analysis of the Nietzschean-affirmative metaphysics of becoming.

[75] "Nietzsche's overcoming of nihilism amounts to an inverted Hegelianism, which pits the power of the positive against the labour of the negative only in order to convert difference-in-itself into difference-for-itself." Brassier, N.U. p. 221.

[76] Brassier, Ray, Nihil Unbound, p. xi (Preface).

This leaves us with both a negative and a positive thesis of our own; either we criticise nature as "not our or anyone's 'home', nor a particularly beneficent progenitor",[77] we scorn nature as "idiotic and stupid" and "reaching its end",[78] or we uphold the stronger claim that rationalism (as a model independent of certain contingencies) can be uprooted and re-installed into non-natural (or post-natural) terrains.

## B2: The Movement Away from Natural Consciousness as a Form of Absolute Idealism or Speculative Realism?

I think we should first identify the specific strand of Hegelianism that is hostile to both any form of mind-independent realism and any form of naturalism, that strand which is initiated by Lacan and coolly operated by Zizek, McGowan and Sbriglia, amongst others (a group that Brassier is associating himself with more and more[79]). This legion of thinkers can be characterised as initiating a turn away from *Hegel's Aristotelianism*; Hegel's interest in Nature as exhibiting specific characteristics, his natural-teleological inclinations and his emphasis on the *organicity* capable of founding both a meeting point of the particular and the universal in consciousness and a meeting of external arbitrary cause and internal purpose in *organic embodiment*.

While it is true that nature takes a backstep after consciousness' successful sublation of the former through the universality of synthetic categories and absolute knowing, this does not mean that nature is *conflated* into cognition as content but rather *integrated* into cognition as content. The *modes of existence* of Nature—such as the various nuances of mechanical, chemical and teleological relation—are still underway, and what Hegel describes as the *immediacy* of Nature still resists explication of

[77] Ibid., p. xi.

[78] Zizek, Slavoj, https://compactmag.com/article/the-stupidity-of-nature.

[79] In his presentation entitled 'The Persistence of Form', he states that more and more he is convinced that the Hegelian—Lacanian—Marxist trajectory is the right way to go considering philosophical and political questions at large.

content based on *mediation* activated in human perception and conceptualisation. In fact, the relationship between immediacy and mediation is much more complex and realist than most commentators suggest; it is not simply that what is immediate (to perception, for example) is *false*, whilst what mediates and comprehends the relations involved in such an account of immediacy is true or more of a robust account. *Immediacy never goes away* no matter how much you mediate its circumstances (nor how much you mediate/meditate upon the mediation ad infinitum).

This decision, to say adieu to Nature, is epitomised in Evald Ilyenkov's statement that "the specific feature of Hegelian philosophy is the fact that the idea of development is fully applied *only to the phenomena of consciousness*".[80] Hence, what we begin to see throughout the ongoing reception of Hegel (especially in the late twentieth to twenty-first century) is the notion that consciousness is autonomous in the sense that it has its own criteria with which to adjudicate its truth or falsity (every falsity in fact being a true falsity or an error correctly tied to the emergence of a truth). The content of thought refers to itself because everything or anything outside of it is at the mercy of simply being reinscribed into conceptual content (what the speculative realists inaugurated as "correlationism") but also—on a more formal basis—the content of thought is a self-activity; it can only relate to other thoughts, and it is this description that encourages Hegel to say that thought is indeterminate and absolute (it is not concerned with anything other than its own activity).

What is the consequence of this? The history of social, cultural, political, artistic, economic and even philosophical practices can be defined and described as the moving shapes of absolute consciousness, which unfold logically as the necessary explications of what was previously implicit. All *scenarios* are historical and *contingent* (in their actualisation), but the *logical expressions* or determinations of such scenarios lead to the same *necessary* conclusion (the realisation of the Idea). This is Hegel's novel integration of the a priori with the a posteriori; there is an objective

[80] Evald Ilyenkov, The dialectics of the Abstract & the Concrete, in Marx's Capital Chapter 3—Ascent from the Abstract to the Concrete Hegel's Conception of the Concrete. See https://www.marxists.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/abstract/abstra3b.htm#:~:text=According%20to%20Hegel%2C%20that%20means,to%20the%20concrete%20human%20spirit.

necessity or limitation (a priori) in which contingency (a posteriori) can be possibilised, yet one can never be deduced without the other.

What has been emphasised as of late is the *negative* dialectical operations intrinsic to this process; that determinate negation 'progresses' by effacing itself (i.e. the "blindspot" within the various oscillations of symbolic, imaginary and real in Hegelian-inspired Lacanian theory). This blind spot is also linked to a new-materialist reading of Hegel which emphasises the dialectical resistance that materiality plays regarding the material signifiers inability to exhaust its own symbolic content, or the role that material repetition has in refusing to be subsumed by the content it repeats.[81]

While it would seem that Hegel's insistence that *cognition require sensation*—and that sensation requires organic embodiment—has been overlooked here,[82] we are still open to the idea that Hegel's particular brand of cognition (as the living heartbeat of knowledge) seems to *use* Nature as a way of realising itself as primarily a divided process (self-othering/self-externality) and soon jets off into the sunset of its own self scrutinisation as *the Idea realising itself*. This brings up questions as to whether we can alleviate cognition (or knowledge of our own self-realisation) from the substantial and independent forms produced through Nature's encounter with Spirit. As Hegel says, "the externality of the Idea constituted by Nature" creates "determinations of the concept" which "have the appearance of an indifferent subsistence and isolation in regards to each other".[83] Though we will talk more about why it is that Nature is the Ideas opposite in a subsequent chapter (on Iain Hamilton Grant), we can preliminarily say that the *Identity of the Idea* is contrasted to Nature through the characterisation of the Idea as *undetermined* and necessary (a certain activity of thinking must ensue from other, prior activities, as the explication of the former implicit notions content), whilst Nature is characterised as causal, arbitrary determination. This also links us to our earlier

[81] See Ray Brassier's presentation entitled The Persistence of Form: Hegel and Psychoanalysis. Slide 16. Presented at University of Brighton, College of Arts and Humanities on 20 February 2017.

[82] We have discussed this in full in our first section on Brassier via Willem DeVries research on Hegel.

[83] PART II of Hegel's Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences. The Philosophy of Nature. See https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/na/nature.htm.

point, which is that the Idea is a necessary a priori feature while nature is a contingent a posteriori feature.

The mistake here, however, is to suggest that *human thought* could manifest in a different scenario (suggesting that Nature is itself an *arbitrary* progenitor). Yet isn't it Nature's *precise form* of otherness to the Idea that creates what we could call natural thought? The opposite of the Idea's supposedly self-generated, causa sui, logical necessity, could theoretically be presented as a contingent locale of external determinations, but Nature's specific 'laws' and capacities do not immediately appear to be the dialectical contra-distinction to the laws and capacities of the Idea. In other words, is gravity, mass, photosynthesis, meteorology and so on the fusion of all of the Idea's purported characteristics with *its opposite*? This is what Nature is presented as being in Hegel; the dialectical, causa sui, counter-existence of the Idea. If Hegel wants to affirm *both* the *necessity of contingency* and the *contingency of necessity*, then not only must contingency come about (necessarily) as the becoming between being and non-being, but also that necessity is itself only comprehended in its movements (in its relationship with contingency). Subsequently it would seem that Nature *necessarily* emerges as a *contingency* threatening the indeterminate dimension of the Idea. Yet this contingency (Nature), through its actualisation and externalisation of the Idea as something at odds with itself (inherently contradictory), becomes necessary because this is precisely how the Idea reconciles itself as absolute knowledge. In other words, just as it is necessary for determinate negation (elaborated upon earlier) to fail in exhaustively turning its repetition into content (furthering the desire to repeat), it is also necessary for contingency to emerge as something that generates the contradiction (and eventual reconciliation) of the Idea, as opposed to the dogma of a self-identical, prelapsarian identity of the Idea with itself from the very beginning.

But why not the dualism (or contra-distinction) of thought and Neptune, or thought and black holes, as opposed to thought and Nature (Earth)? Surely it is the latter because thought *encounters* its other on earth and not anywhere else. But then this would be arguing that Nature (or Earth) does not emerge causa sui as thoughts' opposite, but rather, thought finds itself installed or complicit with Nature as itself an a posteriori encounter. And perhaps the germ of thought unfettered from its

organic, tellurian element also finds itself complicit with other planets not yet discovered or disclosed by us. In other words, we are suggesting that not all forms of thought must have the conditions of possibility exhibited on earth, and hence we disqualify the proposition that Nature is thoughts' (absolute) other. However, the caveat to this is that tellurian (earthly) thought is of a peculiar kind specific to nature. In other words, if one wanted to uproot tellurian thought from its tellurian foundation, then we might find a *different* form of thought than the one anticipated once excavated, transported and upended. For example, would we still preserve our particular implicit 'grasping' of 'under-standing' and various other linguistic (and sub-linguistic) characterisations of thought once removed from our specific gravitational force (relative to the sun)? Would thought be standing on anything at all? Could the *chemical* reactions of the brain, which create certain moods, hormones, memory loss and so on be exempt from 'pure thinking', and what would this be like? And what about the biological and physical constraints found in neuroscience regarding neurons and their determination in perception, learning and behaviour?

What seems pertinent here is discussing thoughts' relationship with earth—not as the dialectical expression of opposites—but rather as the specific incarnation of thought through Nature (just as we can speculate upon a form of thought being incarnated through the dwarf planet of Pluto that may exhibit radically different 'laws' (of gravitation, time-dilation, non-solar energy production etc.). This specific reading can be compatible with Hegelian philosophy as the 'universality' of thought encoded with the 'particularity' of Nature. In J.N. Findlay's words, Hegel's system must:

> go on to exhibit the self-externalization of his purely logical categories in the sensuous shows of nature and in the contingencies which fill space and time … and that it must then study itself returning to itself out of nature's externality, a return which will restate the content of the phenomenology in the form of a real history of spirit.[84]

[84] See J.N. Findlay's 'Foreword' to The Phenomenology of Spirit. p. xxix (1977 edition).

Hence, if the *logical categories of* thought are a priori and in a sense exempt from *relativity* (being absolute descriptions not dependent on time, space, subjectivity, consciousness etc.), then Hegel specifically tracks the emergence of such absolute logical categories in what appears[85] as a material, contingent Nature. Hence, here we do not have a Darwinian or an evolutionary account in the materialist sense, thought it does not emerge through nature as a product of survival, as a form of adaptation, as a blind repetition or as a complexity theory which views non-linear systems as emerging from linear systems that exhibit emergent, self-organised and adaptive behaviour. Logic is there from the 'beginning' in Hegel and even proceeds material organisation. It is the eternal schism—between the a priori and necessary *being of* logical constructivism and the *being that is other to this* (not immediately conceptual *being*) that could be extrapolated upon any area of the cosmos and any type of reality. This is why Hegel states:

> For this reason nature, in the determinate existence, which makes it nature, is not to be deified, nor are the sun, moon, animals, plants, and so on, to be regarded and adduced as the works of God, more excellent than human actions and events. Nature in itself in the idea, is divine, but in the specific mode by which it is nature it is suspended. As it is, the being of nature does not correspond to its concept; its existing actuality therefore has no truth; its abstract essence is the negative, as the ancients conceived of matter in general as the non-ens. But because, even in this element, nature is a representation of the idea, one may very well admire in it the wisdom of God.[86]

Yet there must be something specific to the earth that *co- creates* the unique "self-externalization" of logical categories (in Nature) which would be different from, say, the specific "self-externalization" of logical categories on Jupiter or Mars. However, Hegel may be suggesting that, wherever the Idea can be found (in the cosmos)—as the logical/ideal counterpart to its opposite—this logical/ideal side will subordinate any

[85] As we have already argued, Hegel is very clever in retrospectively stating that all contingency is necessary as it brings about the realisation of the Idea. In other words, if necessity is disclosed at the end of the phenomenology of science of logic, then it has been a necessary route to get there.

[86] PART II of Hegel's Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences. The Philosophy of Nature; Section 193. See link; https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/na/nature.htm.

alien, aleatoric processes and convert them into a logico-spatio-temporal framework.[87] It would seem that Hegel's logic is synonymous with a specific spatio-temporal, multi-linear conception of process, that is, dialectics, antagonism, unfolding, sublation (including discontinuities). In fact, we could say that *logic's very actualisation* is in terms commensurate with the spatio-temporal dimension (this may be his naivety). This harks back to Hegel's notion that the *unfolding* of any contingent occurrence remains logical—as the explication of implicit content, a form of continuity. In other words, the *capacity of the Idea* will force itself on/in any non-tellurian situation. The consistent logical unfolding of the dialectic (logical space-time) would be prevalent in any area of the cosmos, as a priori logic *is the rational form of space-time*; necessity has a specific spatio-temporal pattern which confronts and subsumes differential contingency and superimposes itself onto any universe regardless. Perhaps the non-metaphysical equivalent of this conclusion is to be found in Brassier's claim that "it is necessary to insist on the indivisibility of space and time";[88] wherever there is space (even galactic), there is time.

Hence, it is the *uniqueness of the forms* in which spatio-temporal logic produces in conjunction with earth and not the spatio-temporal activities that nature produces (which appears arbitrary). Subsequently, these forms (or objects), being the first forms that logic (and it's supernatural *embodiment as Idea*) must confront, are seen as *antithetical* to the logic of ideation because they are *determinations* of what has hitherto been *undetermined* (the self-activity or freedom of the Idea) and for this determination to ensue, a new form of existence is instantiated *as externality* (externality as determination). It is this instantiation—which appears to have no biological or material *origins* in the cosmos—which represents the *ontological deviation* at the heart of Being and Subjectivity; that one half of the couplet (internal, undetermined, Idea, subjective) must inevitably encounter the other half (external, determined, otherness, objective) as the necessity of objectivity.

[87] I think Hegel can be accused of the same prioritisation of Time over Space that Brassier applies to both Heidegger and Deleuze; all three philosophers "pit the ineradicable difference of creative time against the physical erasure of annihilating space, which is perceived as a threat to the life of the mind". Brassier, Nihil Unbound, p. 222.

[88] Ibid., p. 222.

What a curious relationship this is between the ideation of being and the being that does not correspond (yet) to this ideation. Nature is "suspended", as it were; oscillating between a refutation of ideation (as its 'Other') and its potential integration into the Idea that it refuses. However, we might not be in such a position to posit consciousness outside of nature. In Iain Hamilton Grant's words: "the investigation of being itself takes place in a cosmos and belongs to the furniture of the material world or of nature; that there exists such things *in it as ontology*".[89] It is conceivable that ontology (the nature of being) is itself part and parcel of the particular make-up of the cosmos (and perhaps merely the earth) insofar as the 'thinking-about-ness' of being (or the 'properties' of being) are themselves part of the 'materiality' of that specific being (earth, the universe, etc.). This forbids us to *arbitrarily* place consciousness (and perhaps even logic) across the board beyond its conditions of possibility wedded to its material infrastructure. Grant continues, "any ontologizing that takes place, takes place as a particular within that cosmos" and hence perhaps what *is*', what *exists*; *being* in its most basic capacity, is not at all arbitrary, generic or abstract but is a specific characteristic of that cosmos or nature.[90] However, if ontology is to be *speculatively* legitimised as a study of *all types of being*—in *kind* and not just *degree*—(not just 'cosmological being', for example), then it might be possible to suggest that ontology addresses "the concept of the universal but locally, as a local feature of the universe",[91] and hence we are back to Hegel's thesis on Nature's particular self-externalisation of the universal (Idea). Yet I see no 'reason' to suggest that the Idea's self-othering in Nature *on earth* is more superior than any other "medium in which ontology arises" other than it being *our mode of ontology* or—if you like—our peculiar, necessary fusion between a *world epistemology* such as Hegel's and how such is deduced from a world ontology. Presumably, "any such cosmos in which there is ontology" has this same fusion between its materiality and its mode of self-ontologising. In this sense, Hegel's thesis on the *particular*

[89] See Iain Hamilton Grant's presentation at 'Speculations on Anonymous Materials' in Berlin; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMoTh3HpO0E&t=608s (my italics).

[90] Implying that there may be a non-existence or non-being outside of this remit that nevertheless is not included in the being of nature or the cosmos.

[91] Ibid.

externalisation (or actualisation) of the *universal* can be applied more speculatively to other medium-specific ontologies potentially exhibited in different universes. What is striking about this claim (that Grant insinuates) is that each "local ontology" which is "an ingredient of that comsos" still manages to deal with *the all of every possible being in every universe.* Hence, the element of universality found in Hegel is truly *absolute* in that there belongs an element that deals with *the all of being* even if its restricted to a certain local (medium of) ontology.

Hegel usually admits that—if opposites can be reconciled—then they probably weren't real opposites in the first place but only co-implicated opposites as "mutual sides" of the whole. In this sense, Nature is not the opposite of the Idea but rather *the product of what emerges as its antagonism*. For Nature to eventually become thought (or the *Idea of* nature), Hegel simply takes what we could conceive as a spatial or substance duality (thought and matter, for example) and makes it a temporal antagonism; matter is yet to be conceived as thought, or thought is yet to grapple with *what it is not* and integrate it into its identity as a more robust thought capable of discerning differences in itself (i.e. the *identity of* difference and identity, as Hegel famously used to say).

## B3: Brassier's Non-Dialectical Rationalism

This is where we get to the crux of Brassier's argument, which is that the identification of difference should not automatically reinscribe or sublate one type of difference into another:

> If knowing undercuts the difference between life and death, it is not by reducing the former to the latter, or by privileging entropy over negentropy – a metaphysical gesture as arbitrary as its vitalist antithesis – but by identifying difference and indifference, life and death, *without synthesising them ontologically*.[92]

[92] P. 222. Nihil Unbound, 2007 (my italics).

This refusal of bilateral synthesis through unilateral identification is also a claim against correlationism. It asserts that one can

> (I)dentify the objective matrix of order and disorder while unbinding the ontological syntheses which would reduce the latter to correlates of thought.[93]

Yet instead of this resulting in a *negative* appraisal of thoughts' unilateral identification of non-thought as a kind of noumenal, inaccessible and unsynthesisable remainder (i.e. one can think X without knowing X), it is *positivised* by suggesting that we are *utilising* a knowledge which cannot itself be reconciled back to Nature, that is, we are not re-inscribing thought back into nature as dialectical (bilateral) in this scenario but are thinking beyond nature; we are thinking the distinction (or even indifference) between thought and nature without this thought being itself a product of only Nature (just as the thinking of life and death, or negantropy and entropy, does not itself fall exclusively into the camp of life just because we are living beings that are thinking it). Regarding Hegel (and even Nietzsche's own ironic remark that we humans are a "rare kind of dead creature"), the identification of death within life (or death as *not* the opposite of life) does not subordinate or sublate the former to the latter but allows thought to distinguish—and identify with—both without be exclusively one or the other:

> Thus, there is a knowing of the real (objective genitive) which repudiates the subordination of knowledge to vital and/or organic interests, but also the need to redeem or otherwise justify reality in order to render it compatible with the putative interests of reason – or 'rationality' – as construed within the bounds of the manifest image.[94]

Now, while Brassier seems to disagree with Hegel's *speculative* reconciliation of mind with nature (and vice versa) as well as his *idealistic* reconciliation (or correlation) between essence and appearance (criticised in Brassier's analysis of the manifest image), we can say that Hegel's

[93] Ibid., p. 222.

[94] Brassier, Ray, Nihil Unbound, p. 222.

reconciliation is achieved through the *prioritisation of thought* (or the 'concept') as the criteria of the real above anything else. If Hegel achieved this hierarchy of thought through the operation of *sublation*, that is, the ongoing integration and explication of earlier content into subsequent, more complex and determinate content (the animism and teleology of thoughts' progression), then Brassier attempts to valorise thought by suggesting that it transcends the categorical differences incumbent upon it (such as 'life' and 'death') and refuses to give one category any foothold over the other in terms of providing either any originary superiority (e.g. vitalism regarding life) or any superiority in the present (as locus of thought). Hence, because thought is *not exhaustively alive* (it also comes from *nothingness* as in the Hegelian and even Badiouian register), it transcends life (as bios) and therefore "thinking has interests which do not coincide with those of living".[95] In my opinion, this kind of thinking is impossible without the desecration of nature by Hegel and his ontology of thought as negation or nothingness, as a cognitive becoming which is just as tied to its non-existence (or disappearance) than it is to the Being that emerges through this disappearance, that is, becoming. Hegel's belief that there is *an essence to knowledge itself* as opposed to exclusively having a functional status as corresponding object to content (i.e. empiricism) also starts the autonomous love affair with ('absolute') thinking itself, which provides the opportunity to start thinking about how the circuitry of thought can be extracted and re-installed, that is, as a *will-to-knowledge* beyond the biological entropy of life.

However, this description of Brassier's position as *non-dialectical* does not sit well with me. While it is generally understood that Hegel's conception of difference is an internal one, that which swallows up external or non-conceptual difference by making such an *antagonism* which presupposes a co-implication between *different differences* (or difference and identity), this does not mean that such co-implicated differences can be successfully parsed out from one to the other as if a form of monism. Difference can be seen as co-implicated but never reducible to one another. In other words, *synthesis* is possible between oppositions, identification is possible as a *suspension* of those oppositions, but it can never be

[95] Ibid., p. xi.

said that the oppositions—of Being and Non-Being, for example—collapse into one another (this is what *Becoming* is for; to *negotiate* both terms). In this sense, Hegel should only be seen as pointing out the functional or complementary (dialectical) roles that the irreducibility of terms such as Being and Non-Being produce, whether in *Becoming* or in *Thought*, yet their *ontological priority* is only ever *eternally suspended* in Hegel; hence, one is not prioritised above the other. Dialectics is the possible (impartial or indirect) synthesis between non-reducible terms, not the conflation of those terms into a positive substance. If Hegel can be conceived as a monist, it is the monism of a substance which itself is self-divided ad infinitum. Regarding Hegel, I wonder just how successful the identity of opposites—such as Being and Non-Being—really is, as the identification is only ever a *third synthesis* which makes the initial point of contact between the aforementioned two categories a form of *actuality in the present* (as both reduction to presence and emergence into presence) beyond any formal meeting of the two as a priori or universal terms.

However, if either Being or Non-Being is successfully (or speculatively) *eradicated* (such as Brassier's novel thinking of *extinction*), then we are in a sense left with the *Becoming* of *Nothing* (determinate negation), without the legitimacy of the *Being* of this *Becoming* as sustaining any sort of metaphysical security or assurance ("everything is dead already"[96]). If, in "roughly one trillion, trillion, trillion (101728) years from now, the accelerating expansion of the universe will have disintegrated any ultimate horizon"[97] of Being, then we are vulnerable to the "disintegration of the fabric of matter itself[98]" and hence any "possibility of embodiment".[99]

Hence, if we are to proceed with Brassier's appraisal of the *will-to-know* beyond any one philosophy of life (vitalism) or death (nihilism in its conventional sense), then it is not because modern science has successfully dissolved the metaphysical boundary between the organic and inorganic (creating a *dialectical* implication of the two instead), but because the capacity of knowledge can identify these two domains without having its conditions of possibility designated by either one category. It is *this*

[96] Ibid., p. 223 (quoting Lyotard, Francois, The Inhuman, 1991, p. 9).
[97] Ibid., p. 228.
[98] Ibid., p. 228.
[99] Ibid., P. 228.

unbinding which allows thought to think the differences between life and death without those differences finding themselves within the categories of life and death themselves. *This* is how it gains its peculiar sense of non-dialectical activity because the identity of this type of thinking is not identified or re-inscribed back into its dialectical conditions of possibility (life and death/being and non-being). In fact, one could say that both nature and the trajectory of extinction is *indifferent* to this speculative will-to-knowledge; it is not part of Nature's (teleological) plan because natures' telos depends on the subsistence and sustainability of *Being* for its progression. Please forgive the anthropomorphism, but it is not Non-Beings plan to entertain a thought which purports to overcome the determinations of death and destruction through rationalising it.

This newfound 'will-to-know' not only has "interests that do not coincide with those of living"[100] but also manages to *estrange* itself from any transcendental/temporal constitution of consciousness inaugurated by Kant through to Hegel, Heidegger and Deleuze. In such respective works, the temporality (or inner form of intuition) of consciousness seems *qualitatively* different from a time that simply complies to extension and the becoming of Nature. This qualitative manoeuvre allows, for example, the development of consciousness to be separate from the non-development of nature in Hegel, it allows for psychic individuation in Deleuze, it allows for a certain existential reading of time in Heidegger etc. Alternatively, the *will-to-know* acknowledges the eventual disintegration of all matter and forms of embodiment in the cosmos; it knows that time cannot be exempt from this disintegration (opting for the space-time continuum of Einsteinian physics), and hence it disenchants any (metaphysical) temporal horizon of thought that asserts itself as beyond any physical, spatio-temporal, horizon*less* fate of thought.[101] In this sense, the will-to-know is complicit in its own disintegration, yet, in this *acknowledgement*, it finds a new dimension in which to carry out ulterior

[100] Xi preface.

[101] "Lyotard invites us to ponder philosophy's relationship to the terrestrial horizon which, in the wake of the collapse of the metaphysical horizon called 'God'—whose dissolution spurred the Nietzschean injunction 'remain true to the earth!' (Nietzsche 1969: 42) has been endowed with a quasi-transcendental status, whether as the 'originary ark' (Husserl), the 'self-secluding' (Heidegger), or 'the deterritorialized' (Deleuze).35. But as Lyotard points out, this terrestrial horizon will also be wiped away, when, roughly 4.5 billion years from now, the sun is extinguished, incinerating the 'originary ark', obliterating the 'self-secluding', and vaporizing 'the deterritorialized'" (Nihil Unbound, p. 223).

concerns. There is a similar moment in Hegelian philosophy, whereby the acknowledgement that we are only *finite* Spirit—as part-organism and hence part-nature—is somehow still inscribed into an infinite Spirit, as the *infinite finite* cycles that seems destined to "return to their ground".

This estrangement of the will to know regarding its material substrate is complex; it acknowledges its complicity with the spatio-temporal fabric of the cosmos and yet triumphs over physical time by thinking its disappearance and also by *reversing death's future axis*. For example, the will-to-know triumphs by thinking death as both prior to and after its knowing; it circumvents the finitude of material processes for an eternal conundrum not dissimilar from Hegel's being and non-being tension because it somehow knows *two deaths*: one constitutive of thought ('solar death')[102] and the other detrimental to thought (the extinction of thought and the disintegration of all matter in the cosmos). But the mistake would be for the will-to-know to assume that the first death is *the same as the second*. The will-to-know cannot transcend the disintegration of all space, time and matter in the cosmos simply *because* it emerges through a form of dying (such as the ongoing death of the sun). A form of death concomitant with life is not the same as a form of death that destroys any possibility for life tout court. However, this slight detour of egoism does not prevent the will-to-know from the triumph of *thinking these two deaths*: (1) what Lyotards calls solar death (or stellar death), that is, the slow extended death of the sun which is constitutive of thinking, and (2) the disintegration of all plants and stars and matter in "roughly one trillion, trillion, trillion (101728) years from now … pushing the extinguished universe deeper and deeper into an eternal and unfathomable blackness".[103]

The metaphysical horizon of thought may be criticised through Brassier's utilisation of Lyotard's essay 'Can Thought go on Without a Body?';[104] but could we not suggest, through a kind of Meillassouxian manoeuvre, that, in thinking its own death, it somehow overreaches itself

[102] Brassier, Ray, Nihil Unbound, P. 223.

[103] Ibid., p. 228.

[104] J-F. Lyotard, The Inhuman: Reflections on Time, tr. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991.

and provides a place outside of death, at least while thought still has the lifespan to think it. This is not a form of conventional realism because the real that the will-to-know thinks does not exist in material form; it is not accessing an alternative material condition for reality because "all space, time, plants, stars and matter … has disintegrated". It is possibly the *immaterial* dimension of what Iain Hamilton Grant calls "inexistence",[105] which becomes a necessary ingredient—however peripheral—of what emerges (as existence).[106] Is it possible to think this inexistence, which can be simply understood as the thinking of thought *not being there* (i.e. a temporal issue), or, as the *inexistence which generates becoming existent*, as a thought which can never be realised in its full existence because it never is fully in existence (just as the Hubble telescope cannot take a photo of the origins of the universe, as within the time that would be required to elapse for this image to be generated, the present existence on which the telescope is based would have changed, and furthermore the image would show the spectre or inexistence of what only *was* through the mediating temporal capturing of the image). This second issue of inexistence is more concerned with *partiality* rather than temporality (although the two are related in this scenario); if thought could make a self-portrait, it would be *incomplete* because thought cannot exhaust itself through any one moment in time, but it is also a quasi-spatial issue, a thought about thought itself—or a classification of all classifications—would have to make room for this addendum. Thought can never account for the designation of totalisation without integrating such a thought into such a totalisation, hence automatically refuting this totality. This fails not only through the ongoing future-oriented supplementations (new thoughts, constant revisions etc.) but also retrospectively through the 'ancestral'[107] provocation that thought is always incomplete because it cannot account for what makes it exist as its moment of non-conceptual emergence or condition (i.e. its inexistence).

[105] See Iain Hamilton Grant's talk, Speculations on Anonymous Materials, here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMoTh3HpO0E.

[106] We will look into this in more detail in our chapter on Iain Hamilton Grant.

[107] Using a term of Meillassoux's to designate a time prior to consciousness itself.

Brassier provides us with a way of autonomising thought which—using a Hegelian term—not only "suspends" thought from both its natural origin and hence its implication with life, existence, bios and so on but also "suspends" thought from life's complementary antitheses, such as death, finitude and the inorganic.

He initiates this, not by refusing thoughts' *ontological lineage* with both nature and death (i.e. that being and non-being, and entropy and negentropy, are co-implicated terms) but rather through suggesting that *thought distinguishes itself from these categorical processes*, and, hence, thoughts' fate, that is, its will-to-know, does not seem to appear as commensurable with either former category. It is not on the side of life because it is spurred by the death drive of itself and the solar death that propels it. This acknowledgement makes it (the will-to-know) sceptical of life's one-dimensional (or evolutionary) ardent bent on affirming life at all costs, and therefore it produces "interests that do not coincide with those of living". But, inversely, the will-to-know is not particularly invested in the all-encompassing death that it must inevitably succumb to because *it has interests that do not coincide with death too*, an interest that does not coincide with either life or death but rather is invested in a heterotopic space that can identify both and sublate both into knowledge without that knowledge itself being subsumed back into those conditions in which it now knows. The notion of Hegelian *sublation* should provide one with a rough resource in which to posit *knowledges knowing* of both life and death as a concept above or "higher" than these two states. Hence, the two states are *sublated* by the knowledge which designates them and not the other way around (a kind of radical idealism as the evolution of the idea as immaterial). Alternatively put, Brassier claims that "the will to know, in its antagonism with the so-called will to live, is driven by the will to nothingness, understood as the compunction to become equal to the in-itself".[108] And perhaps nothingness is this alternative between life and death, a nothingness which is not reduced to the contradistinctions between life and death: a thinking of nothingness, not prior or posterior to life and death but as the actual *cancellation* of these terms. In other words, an inexistence which cannot even be dialectically connected (e.g.

[108] Nihil Unbound, p. 227, 2007.

in any Hegelian sense) to existence. It is perhaps the non-existence of both existence and inexistence, after these dialectical terms have any purchase: after the obliteration of materiality which predicates existence and non-existence. However, even in " eternal and unfathomable blackness",[109] the nothingness of the will-to-know would not yet have succeeded in reducing qualities such as "blackness" into the in-itself in which such a quality would be eradicated. It is this "compunction to become equal to the in-itself" that enables thought to transgress the oppositional categories or conditions of life and death; the 'in-itself' is a nothingness beyond empirical or positive nothingness (beyond absence) and not a spiritualist declaration.

Hence, are we simply wrong to think that *extinction* functions only within the material dyad of life and death? Is it not, rather, an accomplice to the will-to-know in that it destroys the possibility of both life and death. When extinction is secured, nothing will be allowed to die (or, alternatively, *nothing* will not be something that *can* live or die). The nothing we are referring to here is the nothing 'in-itself' (or the nothing *of* the in-itself). And this levelling of all being and death into the in-itself is also a refusal to continue that other dyad of 'mind' and world' found in abundance in the history of philosophy:

> Extinction portends a physical annihilation which negates the difference between mind and world, but which can no longer be construed as a limit internal to the transcendence of mind – an internalized exteriority, as death is for Geist or Dasein– because it implies an exteriority which unfolds or externalizes the internalization of exteriority concomitant with consciousness and its surrogates, whether Geist or Dasein. Extinction turns thinking inside out, objectifying it as a perishable thing in the world like any other (and no longer the imperishable condition of perishing).[110]

But for now, our comprehension of extinction "indexes the thought of the absence of thought" onto us; hence, we are temporarily uncorrelated from the inevitable scenario of our dying as the death of thought because

[109] Nihil Unbound, p. 228.
[110] Ibid., p. 229.

we *have this thought*—however undeveloped and unrealised this thought is. This thought is itself aware that it will be eventually destroyed, and this initial thinking of difference (thinking of death) will not be one occurring or identified *in thought* forever but rather will be a difference penetrated from outside of thought; its extinction/obliteration and this act of extinction cannot be identified as bilateral (commensurate with thought) but as a "non-dialectical identity".[111] The identification of this process of extinction cannot itself be reconciled or identified in thought:

> This is why it (extinction) represents an objectification of thought, but one wherein the thought of the object is reversed by the object itself, rather than by the thought of the object. For the difference between the thought of the object and the object itself is no longer a function of thought, which is to say, of transcendence, but of the object understood as immanent identity…, the object's difference from the concept is given ('without givenness', which is to say, without-correlation).[112]

But doesn't extinction do this to itself too (if we are to construe extinction as the very destruction of time and space)? In other words, it destroys its own (material) conditions for/of destruction. It destroys the very possibility of destruction. Consequently, extinction "has a transcendental efficacy precisely insofar as it tokens an annihilation which is neither a possibility towards which actual existence could orient itself" (because this orientation will be terminated—or already is terminated—by the fact of extinction), nor can extinction give "datum from which future existence could proceed" (for the same reasons). Extinction retroactively disables projection, just as it pre-emptively abolishes retention. In this regard, extinction unfolds in an 'anterior posteriority' which usurps the 'future anteriority' of human existence.

Regarding the manifest and scientific images respectively, extinction seems to act within a remit *foreign* to both; scientific naturalism cannot

[111] Ibid., p. 230.

[112] Ibid., p. 230. This immanent non-dialectical identity seems vague to me but Brassier suggests that much of its conceptual cogency and import can be found in his essay/s on Laruelle (see Chap. 5: Being Nothing) as "the non-dialectical identity of the distinction between relation and non-relation" (p. 230).

engage with cosmic extinction on such a grandiose scale, nor can phenomenology rid itself of its horizon and of its presence (contra the extinction thesis). Yet extinction equally *applies* to both—it reconciles both (both transcendental synthesis and material synthesis are equally exposed to extinction), while the conceptual import of extinction still somewhat eludes both manifest and scientific images/discourses. However, this elusive insight can spur adaptations of the earlier dichotomous images of the manifest and scientific such as "the phenomenology of trauma and the extinction of phenomenology" whereby both provocations indirectly (impossibly or unilaterally) reference the other: How does one register the extinction of all mind and matter psychologically? Or, where (and how) does one situate research into the end of phenomenology (as either an extension of the phenomenological legacy, or a scientific meta-preoccupation with the disappearance of appearance)?

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## Brassier's Speculative Import

In our first section on Brassier, entitled 'The Scientific and Manifest Image', we critiqued the (heuristic?) duality of such opposed images through Hegel, but we must still applaud Brassier's *speculative* sentiment; even though he seems to side with the scientific image, he still maintains that the explanations of the scientific image cannot be exhaustively catalogued as a viable ontological theory and therefore cannot be sufficiently mapped or integrated into the reality they are denoting. This leads Brassier to suggest that such harbingers of the scientific image have hidden predilections towards a pragmatism found in scientific realism and the neutral sciences. Regarding the manifest image, other than for *normative* purposes, it would seem that it was about time that the furniture of our Folk Psychological values, beliefs and intentions were aired out. However, as Brassier mentions towards the very end of the book, "it is precisely the discourse of phenomenology that is best suited to registering the trauma

that portends the disintegration of the manifest image".[113] It is precisely phenomenology's transcendental assumptions about consciousness that are under attack by extinction, and the 'meaning' of this ('meaninglessness') provides us with a specific dimensionality beyond physicalism and epiphenomenalism. It provides us with a *speculative realism* disclosed in *philosophy as the organon of extinction*;[114] it discloses itself within the quasi-metaphysical account of the 'death drive' in Freud, the unilateral, non-dialectica, non-identical 'pure' nothingness of Francois Laruelle, and nothingness of the 'in-itself' characterised in some post-Kantian philosophy.

In our second section on Brassier, entitled 'The In-itself of the For us', we explicated Brassier's *speculative* Hegelian thesis on the role that determinate negation plays in consciousness as a condition and motor for any form of synthesis. Like Kant, this operation of experience cannot itself be found in experience, yet its patterning process can be formalised as the *phenomenology of consciousness*. Yet even this constant retrospective reflection of its own process can only give us access to the way in which determinate negation *manifests to us* as forms which harbour implicit content in them *of this negation process*. Negation therefore never has an 'in itself' dimension because nothingness is dialectical for Hegel; it is always a *nothingness of* something or other (a nothingness which follows from a certain process or rule) and never a nothingness-in-itself.

However, Brassier speculatively hypostatises this determinate negation—which cannot itself be gifted to consciousness—as a *real process* "behind the back of consciousness"[115] as its non-empirical operation. It is Brassier's speculative conclusion that 'determinate negation' is not itself reflected upon accurately, that it "effaces itself". This assertion leads Brassier into the soirees of a post-Hegelian, post-Lacanian psychoanalytic reading of the unconscious, as something which temporarily resists determinate negation or exhibits the "jamming" of this operation in the symptoms of fixation/neurosis. I have tried to anchor these psychoanalytic theories back into a Hegelian register of the universality and particularity

[113] Nihil Unbound, p. 232.

[114] Nihil Unbound, p. 239.

[115] Hegel, G.W.F, p. 55. Introduction. Section 87. 1977. Oxford University Press.

of certain content, that is, if something is believed to possess all possible content (or the universality of all content), then there seems to be no room for negation/becoming beyond this point (why would Narcissus wish to negate the reflection and walk away?)

In the third section, entitled 'Natural Rationalism and Neo-Rationalism', we explicated Brassier's speculative thesis on the trajectory of this *in itself of the for us* as something sustainable *beyond nature*. The speculative trajectory of the will-to-know becomes unfettered from the one dimensional aspect of bios or life that thinking only half embraces because it is only bedfellows with nature and not an actual companion; the will-to-know emerges just as much through solar destruction, the slow dying of the earth (including nature) and the *inexistence* (Grant) or *Non-Being* (Hegel) ontologically implicated with the emergence of thought (thought as the becoming/determination of nothingness, as an undetermined form with an undetermined origin).[116] The relative independence of this will-to-know consequently has *real* implications for both the manifest and scientific image in the form of "the phenomenology of trauma and the extinction of phenomenology".[117]

## Brassier's Realist Import

The role of *speculation* is to engage with any form of ontological thinking that is not accepted in the conventional domains of ontology, the real of scientific materialism, the (irreducible) real of phenomenology and the a priori determination of reality in transcendental philosophy (although this also has an agnostic element in someone like Kant), and the real of naturalism (as an advancement of Aristotelian natural philosophy but without his formal and final cause). I see it as an act or choice, perhaps a

[116] This isn't simply the epistemological problem of starting with thoughts' content regarding a content-less origin (the becoming of the non-being/being dyad); it is also an ontological problem of acknowledging this indeterminate power of the negative beyond—or implicated by but not exhausted within—what emerges through the relation between being and non-being, that is, nature, biological life.

[117] Nihil Unbound, p. 231.

'decision' which Laruelle wishes for us not to take in order to remain steadfast to the radical unilateral immanence of the one.[118]

However, the role of the putative *real* is to *place* rather than to *search*. It is to designate—positively or negatively (which usually amounts to the same form, of 'resistance'[119])—some entity, process, object, thing and so on which *defy* the absolute cogency of the former justified domains of ontology. Meillassoux's *speculative* sentiment is in his *search* for the 'great outdoors' of reality, as a refutation of the principle of sufficient reason and the ingenious tautologies of phenomenological ("correlationist") thinking. However, the job is not done yet. What he does next is to impossibly posit or *place* a radical contingency (or hyper-chaos) that allows him to move from within the so-called correlation of thought and being and access its (hyper-chaos') absolute dimension. It is absolutely necessary that things could change at any moment whatsoever, from "trees to stars, from stars to laws, from physical laws to logical laws; and this not by virtue of some superior law whereby everything is destined to perish, but by virtue of the absence of any superior law capable of preserving anything, no matter what, from perishing".[120] And perhaps the idea to take away from this *placement* of the real is that such an account of absolute hyper-chaos cannot be reduced to a hyper-chaos 'for us'. and hence it is this posting of hyper-chaos that retroactively affords Meillassoux access (which started off as *speculation*) to this real of hyper-chaos.

Using this kind of heuristic distinction between speculation and the real, Brassier's speculative *realism* consists in being unsatisfied with both the findings of the manifest and scientific images of reality (the former for its folk-psychological idealism and deficiency and the latter for its complicity with scientific realism). This leaves a speculative gap (or

[118] See Laruelle Francois, From Decision to Heresy Experiments in Non-Standard Thought, Urbanomic, 2012.

[119] For example, although Harman's philosophy of objects has been described as a 'negative theology' because of its attempt to formulate the 'withdrawn' as that which 'resists' cataloguing in terms of presence, relationality, access and the phenomenal, one could also suggest that Harman's philosophy is a positive thesis about the irreducible reality of objects; there definitely is an existing 'thing' that withdraws and resists; as can be found in the failure of the sensual object and the sensual profile of the real object to fully exhaust the reality of the object beyond or in excess of such domains.

[120] Meillassoux, Quentin, After Finitude, p. 53.

"incorrigibility") for the possibility of some unknown force or some resistance of reality refusing the conciliations of both manifest and scientific sublation. Brassier is pointing negatively to something, to a real that resists both the conciliation of the two images and the conflation of one image onto another as a suitable objective epistemology. What I interpret as his conclusion is that there requires a form of *unilateral identity* which the scientific image is yet to acknowledge, that the findings of scientific realism (along with neuroscience) cannot simply catalogue its findings as *identical* to the reality being catalogued, nor can it claim that such a reality is exempt from the transcendental philosophers query into this extrapolation of objectivity which overreaches itself by foregoing an 'account' of objectivity (i.e. a criterion or 'condition of possibility'). In other words, just as consciousness cannot identify its 'external' destruction through extinction (i.e. as a difference which consciousness itself can think, as a *difference within thought*), it is not possible either that every domain of science can successfully subsume the unilaterality of its (anterior[121]) conditions as something *within* the contents of their findings.

The next realism comes in the form of the study of the formal and material mechanisms "behind the back of consciousness" (as Hegel once said). In other words, it is a reality of operation which is not simply an adequation of thinking to its object (as correspondence) but determines such content negatively from within, as the inclusion or revision of a certain nothing (the falsity of the first object) with a new integrated nothing (the revised object) that is now explicated in the former (ad infinitum). Hence, there is a characterisation of the real as *negativity* which paradoxically seems to "efface" what it is trying to negatively determine; it is the reality of determinate negation's *failure* to infiltrate what it is determining which propels it forwards (the success of this failure); hence, we are attempting the impossible (or paradoxical) by trying to disclose this *glitch* as convertible into determinate content. Brassier flirts with the idea that this resistance is associated with the *materiality of the unconscious* that psychoanalysis engages with (a Lacanian real), and I also hold that

[121] Brassier uses the term 'anterior' to distinguish it from purely 'posterior' unilateral difference found in Meillassoux's ancestral statements of the earth *before* the advent of human consciousness. p. 236, Nihil Unbound.

psychoanalytic terms such as 'fixation' and 'neurosis' seem to disclose this resistance aspect of the real. However, I suggest that psychoanalysis reveals the metaphysical or a priori contradiction found in Hegel's attempt to show universality in every particular instance (the Idea). In other words, it is not possible that the former can override (or "overdetermine") the latter whereby the requirement for negational becoming seems futile as *all is laid bare in the eternal instant*:

> It is a whole which, after running its course and laying bare all its content, returns again to itself; it is the resultant abstract notion of the whole.[122]

Brassier's third realism can be found in his hypostatisation of a 'will-to-knowledge', which only half-lives with Nature and only half-lives with Nothingness (or the non-being of Hegelian metaphysics) as it simultaneously relies on the nothingness from which its emerges and the vitalist horizon of natural being in which it orients itself towards. Yet, in its simultaneous participation with these two master categories of being and non-being (or life and death), it succeeds in *distinguishing* them through a manoeuvre that cannot be re-grounded into *one* of the two categories nor *either category*. Instead, it transcends such biological dyadic terms through such questions as: *How does thought think a world without thought* and *how does thought think the death of thinking?*[123] In a sense, the will-to-know *sublates* the earlier contradistinctive categories that give rise to it (life/death, being/non-being) and instantiate a new reality or acknowledgement outside of, that is, *the external objectification of thought qua extinction*. It is *this* reality which is to be found implicitly in Brassier's later chapters on Freud's death drive, Lyotards 'solar catastrophe' and Levinas' 'seizure of phenomenology'. In brief, all these interpretations encourage the same conclusion:

> (T)he will to know is driven by the traumatic reality of extinction, and strives to become equal to the trauma of the in-itself whose trace it bears.

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[122] The Phenomenology of Mind Preface, On scientific knowledge. See; https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/ph/phprefac.htm.

[123] Ibid., p. 223.

> In becoming equal to it, the will to know is finally rendered commensurate with the in-itself.[124]

* * *

I wish to add a quick segway to the second half of this book. We have implied that Harman and Grant are the two speculative realists most alike because they have a quasi-positive account of nature, that is, as a realm of distinct but not wholly autonomous objects for Harman, and as a locus or particularity that expresses universality in Grant. This is opposed to Meillassoux's rationalist account of "indifferent matter" and Brassier's anti-vitalist and purely epistemological account of nature. However, we can also say that it is Harman and Brassier who are more aligned in their decision to designate *the real* (as opposed to, say, Meillassoux's speculative *materialism* and Grant's onto-physics). Why? Because Harman employs the use-term 'real' regarding the 'real object' that withdraws from phenomenal and, hence, relational access. He also designates the 'real' to a set of 'real qualities' that cannot be pinned down by both phenomenal and scientific models which desubstantialise practicality in many ways.[125] Brassier can also be seen to employ a contra-distinctive 'real'; there is a real that resists both folk psychological accounts of consciousness and scientific realist accounts of consciousness. As we have already seen, there is also a 'real' within the confines of consciousness itself, "behind the back of consciousness", as something which cannot be further integrated into concepts, experience nor content. Finally, there is also the reality of the will-to-know, pitted against the reality of vitalist conditions of pure life on the one hand and the nihilist entropy of nothingness on the other. In other words, it is a reality of knowing that upsets the very distinctions of life and death and even temporal

[124] Ibid., p. 239.

[125] All phenomena are phenomena; their particularity does not stymie their mode of appearing. Science equally—in its tendency to undermine objects into a layer of fundamental (and usually arbitrary) reality—also does away with any ontological account of difference or particularity which Harman's ontology does afford (the real differences between zebras and apples, for example, but also the difference between *this* apple and *that* apple).

orientation, as the will-to-know is constituted by the slow death of the sun (which has already happened) whilst it awaits the death of all material conditions of consciousness, which its acknowledgement (the will-to-know's acknowledgement of its own demise) almost raises it to a dimension beyond those conditions (transcendental nihilism). Meillassoux, on the other hand, does emphasise the use-term 'real' in his book *After Finitude* but rather designates a speculative materialism of hyper-chaos that is not in cahoots with consciousness and, hence, any super category of 'reality'. In fact, if Meillasouc saw hyper-chaos as spontaneously raising itself to the level of the real, it would destroy that claim as soon as it was asserted. Similarly, I see Grant as a speculative materialist because any designation of 'reality'—as a super category—would have to *include the designation within it*—as part of that material reality—and hence the real cannot be properly distinguished from the emergence of 'ideation', and hence reality cannot be discriminated sufficiently to be 'this' or 'that', as a list that excludes its own synthesis or discriminates its own existence from the in-existence which is part of its emergence.

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# 4

# Quentin Meillassoux: Hyper-Chaos or Dialectics?

## Which Hegel?

We have moved from the Aristotelian inspired readings of Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* in conjunction with Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology, to the absolute (and somewhat impersonal) phenomenological exercises found in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in conjunction with Brassier's particular brand of nihilist rationalism. We now turn to Hegel's *Science of Logic* in order to rearticulate Meillassoux's position regarding *the necessity of contingency*. An important factor here is the opposition between Hegel's association of *contradiction* with necessity and essence, and Meillassoux's association of the principle of *noncontradiction* with contingency. We will also contrast Meillassoux's notion of "correlationism" with Hegel's theory of "natural consciousness". If Meillassoux associates human *experience* as a "transparent cage" which always already fuses thinking with being, Hegel characterises experience as the partial *negation of being* and hence we have no access to either thought or being properly (ideally) speaking. The correlation that might be applicable to Hegel is the entrapment of Thought and Being through

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*the familiar*, which Hegel defines as "the unemployment of thought". However, Hegel argues time and time again that 'truth' and 'knowledge' are incompatible with such an "immediate" image of experience; what assails such consciousness is the very motor of the dialectic itself and hence the developing stages or sequences of thought are denied to first-person experience in this scenario.

However, as soon as Being is seen in conjunction with Non-being, one would have to accuse Hegel of correlating both Being and Non-Being to thought; thought is the disclosure of Being and Non-Being qua a *Becoming* that connects (correlates) them. The question implied here is whether "pure being" and "pure nothingness" can be speculated upon *outside of* Becoming (the correlation) or whether they remain "suspended" through the Hegelian notions of *determination*, the *concrete* and the *actual* (which are all Becoming processes).

## Which Meillassoux?

The Meillassoux we will be looking at will be strictly the Meillassoux of *After Finitude*. No other monograph of his has been fully published or translated into English yet and so we will occupy ourselves with the concepts found in that book such as the problem of the 'arche-fossil', the principle of factiality, the facticity of the correlation, and Meillasoux's radical re-reading of Humes' 'problem of induction', which will lead him to his greatest of all ideas; the radical contingency of hyper-chaos.

## A: Correlationism

> Correlationism rests on an argument as simple as it is powerful, which can be formulated as follows: there can be no X without a givenness of X, and no theory about X without a positing of X. If you speak about something, the correlationist will say, you speak about something that is given to *you*, and posited by *you*. The argument for this thesis is as simple to formulate as it is difficult to refute: it can be called the "argument from the circle",

> and consists in remarking that every objection against correlationism, is an objection produced by your thinking, and so dependent upon it.[1]

Most of us by now are familiar with Meillassoux's argument *against* correlationism. Although he applauds the above rhetorical device as possessing an "exceptional strength",[2] it will be Meillassoux's objective to deconstruct and denounce this form of argumentation whilst simultaneously reconstructing what 'correlationism' leaves out, that is, a robust notion of the *absolute* capable of safely transporting thought to a reality-in-itself; what Meillassoux terms 'hyper chaos'.

However, the 'novelty' of this essay (and the other essays in this book) is of course its *Hegelian* reading of such speculative realist thinkers, and a Hegelian can already spot a certain amount of wiggle-room in the above passage. For example, there are passages in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* whereby an 'X' is "posited" whilst denoting that this X cannot be found in consciousness (or 'natural consciousness' as he used to say). For example:

> But it is just this necessity itself, or the origination of the new object, that presents itself to consciousness without its understanding how this happens, which proceeds for us, as it were, behind the back of consciousness. Thus in the movement of consciousness there occurs a moment of being-in-itself or being-for-us which is not present to the consciousness comprehended in the experience itself.[3]

There may be some that will argue that Hegel is still stating that some 'X' is "presented to consciousness", but 'presentation' is not the same as 'positing'. In fact, Hegel's use of the word 'presented' is *speculative* because there is no way to gauge the existence or determination of this 'X'; it is not conceptual (i.e. we do not know what the concept 'is' nor how it functions), it is not empirical, it is not even form-al (it does not have a formal language), etc.

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[1] Meillassoux, Quentin, Time without Becoming (Presentation), Middlesex University, London, 8th May, 2008, p. 1.

[2] Ibid., p. 1.

[3] *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 56, Introduction, Oxford University Press, 1977.

Referring to our chapter on Brassier, what was termed 'the formal unconscious' in that section is in conventional Hegelian language the 'in itself', that is, knowledge—or the essence of knowledge—*prior to the reflection of that knowledge in objects of perception* (i.e. the being for consciousness of the in-itself). It is crucial to make this ontological distinction, between knowledge as a non-empirical or *a priori* system (in-itself), and the 'instrumentalisation'[4] of this knowledge through human subjectivity upon the objects of everyday experience. In a sense, we can already see where Hegel is going with this; the first knowledge is simply mediated through the second ("natural consciousness"), yet because these two operations consist of the same capacity or "medium"[5] of knowledge, what we have is the process of the second knowledge being reinscribed or subsumed into the first. It is the distinction between the two types of knowledge which sets up a distinction in which to discriminate or evaluate the success or failure of their correspondence.[6]

Why is this important regarding Meillassoux's claims about correlationism? For two reasons:

1. The operation of 'positing' isn't itself posited but resides speculatively "behind the back of consciousness". In other words, in Hegelian philosophy, we can think we have a theory of X but the knowledge utilised to 'grasp' such an 'X' is not in fact present in that act but only *exhibited* in our experience of the world as the residue or accretion of that result; content (the revisable object for example). We just get a type of compensatory lump of content as a result of all the hard work of determinate negation. We actually *don't know the object* nor *how we know* about the object. Hence, even in the safe "correlation" of human subject–object relations here on earth, the process is far from transparent, and when we posit, say, a tree, we are not acquainted with this positing (as something in the subject for example a 'la Descartes) nor do we really posit 'tree' as a self-identical, substantial 'X' or 'thing'.

[4] Although Hegel would not have approved of this term.

[5] *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel, G.W.F, 1977, Oxford University Press, p. 46.

[6] Yet, of course, this is no conventional correspondence theory of truth; both *a priori* and synthetic sides are not bare facts but negotiate each other through a moving dialectical whole.

Ironically, Hegel's thesis suggests that there are even non-posited moments in the act of his phenomenology, let alone the chronological problem of positing an existence prior to the advent of human consciousness (what Meillasssoux calls 'ancestrality'[7]) or the spatio-temporal problem that Einstein gives us regarding the possibility of the warping of space–time radically incommensurable to our own spatio-temporal schema developed aprioristically by Kant. To conclude, in Hegelian philosophy, *we do not posit the in itself as X.* We *cannot* posit it. In fact, *we do not posit but negate*; we are simply compensating the absence of such content X with additional negations which create content. In Hegel's terminology, it is the *becoming of* nothing that negation affords.[8]

2. The 'X' that we epiphenomenally posit, as a result of determinate negation (being in-itself) mediated through experience (being for us), is itself a *contradictory* X. It is an X that is only hypostatized as a positive entity fully present to itself, but really it is self-diving for at least two reasons; (1) similar to Brassier's thesis on the 'will-to-know', the 'object' is just as dependent on its *non-being* dimension as it is its being dimension (i.e. its being of a becoming). Because of this, the 'object's' existence is characterised as a "suspension"; as the *actua* l, which, by virtue of its *temporal identity* (as actual[9]), cannot lay claim to properly exhibiting *all its moments in one identity* (the *total* identity of the object for example) but can only exhibit a non-objective identity; the identity between the universality expressed in the particular, and hence the particular instances of the universal. This certainly cannot be posited in Meillassoux's quasi-empirical sense of the operation of positing.

Hence, the problem we Hegelians have with Meillassoux's definition of "correlationism" is twofold:

[7] Meillassoux, Quentin, *After Finitude*, Continuum, 2008, see ch. one 'Ancestrality'.

[8] See the opening chapter of *Science of Logic* for this kind of auto-negation/determination of nothingness characterised as thoughts' own self-activity.

[9] Actualisation and the concrete can be seen as the suspension of being and non-being dimensions (or processes) for a present determination. This present actuality may secure a relation to the universal in which this certain particularity is an instance of, but this reconciliation is not analogous to any positive or eternal identity of the object or concept exhibited.

1. Meillassoux reduces 'positing' to either a present-at-hand thought or an empirical datum, while the *factum* of *thoughts positing* (determinate negation) is itself not posited in Hegelian philosophy. Hence you can think X without really positing either the factum of thought or the object itself (as contradiction).
2. Meillassoux assumes that there is a radical absoluteness of *the outside* which—through contradistinction—suggests that we are destined to solipsistically or claustrophobically live through our own subjective conditions of givenness (or possibility) like Narcissus fixated on his own reflection. Yet this form of subjective transcendence is the very thing that escapes empirical definition (it is the condition for empirical definition and hence cannot be catalogued inside that definition). Hence, following Hegel, Lacan, Zizek and such a trajectory, it is this *split*—within the subject—where the absolute can be found as point of contingency if you will; the absolute distinction between being and appearance, or, subjectivity and objectivity, etc. that should be evaluated as a site of absolute uncertainty (think Badiou's 'event') rather than designating this absolute to what Meillassoux himself later describes as the indifference of matter, or, radical contingency, however distantly situated in the cosmos.

To elaborate both of these points successively; one could say that it is in Hegel's speculative extrapolation of the *factum* of consciousness (in-itself) that the absolute can be accessed; as the *a priori* structures of rationality. Hence, Hegel subverts this notion of "correlationism" *from the inside*, not only showing us that *correlational correspondence* is not in fact present or posited in phenomenal (or "natural") thought, but also by suggesting that there is an *inaccessible capacity within consciousness* which is not entirely relative (or contingent) upon the way in which experience shows itself to us (the self-externalisation of the Idea in many ways[10]) and hence possesses its own absolute frame of reference. However, in many ways, this 'absolute' is defined through a different criterion than Meillassoux's absolute. While Hegel's absolute of self-consciousness is

[10] In Hegel's philosophy of nature, we interpret there that nature is 'grasped' (or nature itself is presented as) already another facet of the absolute; nature through "the self-externalisation of the Idea". Hence, nature finds itself participating in the absolute and universal activity of the Idea and is not ontologically separate from it.

aware of itself as essentially real and as expressing its own individuality (think of self-consciousness as absolute in-itself; as a non-relative dimension like Harman's non-relative real object), Meillassoux's absolute—although also non-relative—is located heuristically *outside of human consciousness*, outside of the conscious 'givenness' of the world, outside of *life* even.

However, doesn't Meillassoux—at least methodologically—lean towards the Hegelian hypothesis in this respect? Does he not contradict his first interpretation of the correlations "implacable" quality and "exceptional strength" through asserting that it is possible to de-absolutise the false absolutisation of the correlation and hence burrow through to an absolute capable of placing the former absolute (its sufficient conditions) into question? Consequently, we are *not* in fact stuck within the "performative contradiction" of thinking the unthinkable or positing the unposited because the force that de-absolutises this initial manifest correlation *seeps through* into every posited act; as the radical contingency of every entity whatsoever (not just the facticity of the correlate but the *facticity of everything in that correlate*; the 'givenness' of objects). Hence, instead of a Hegelian *speculative idealism* that accesses the *sufficient* absolute though the non-relative capacity of reason, Meillassoux gives us a *speculative materialism* that accesses the *non-sufficient* absolute through denoting a non-relative capacity of hyper-chaos *from which arose* the contingency of correlational thinking ('idealist' givenness). But, as some commentators have noted, Meillassoux must first initiate (and hence legislate) an "intellectual intuition"[11] which propels this belief in hyper-chaos (i.e. it cannot be *wholly* empirically or mathematically deduced).[12] Interestingly, Meillassoux argues that this attitude is not metaphysical but speculative; the former is the argument for an absolutely necessary entity (God, Reason, Mind, Nature, 'World', etc.), while the latter concerns the argument for the absolutely necessary *possibility* underpinning any one

[11] See Brassier, Ray, *Nihil Unbound*, Ch. 3: The Enigma of Realism.

[12] Even though Cantorian set-theory initiates a more expansive theory of infinity, I do not see why this must entail that such an infinity is either "chaotic" or 'non-sufficient'. Furthermore, in Meillasssoux's chapter on Ptolemy's Revenge in *After Finitude*, he explicitly states that mathematisation does not secure the absolute status of the "object, event, processual-stability" but rather denotes an absolute "indifference to thought" (see *After Finitude*, p. 117).

particular entity (or that an entity might not 'be' in alternative scenarios). In Meillassoux's own words, "we must uncover an absolute necessity that does not reinstate any form of absolutely necessary entity".[13] Yet, is this really antithetical to Hegel? Does Hegel really set out to define a single explanatory ground for being or thinking? Not at all. In fact, he argues for the opposite; that the necessary non-ground of philosophical activity "is the content's own reflection that first posits and generates what that content is".[14] And what this content *is* cannot itself be subsumed into an origin or 'content of all content'[15] because this form of conceptual activity "negates the simple, thereby posits the determinate difference of the understanding"[16] (with the caveat that such thinking "equally dissolves this difference, and so it is dialectical").[17] In other words, Hegel's formalisation of thinking always *supplements* any abstract, dogmatic or false thought,[18] which is hence impartially known (not yet made explicit) with its own 'differential' (or self-investigatory) thrust. It is the *determination of* such differences, or their unity, which gives us an initial description of thinking in its simplest sense. If this locus of differentiation for Hegel is found in the Subject (similar to Kant), then it is alternatively found in the differential mathematical invariants of Galileo which themselves become *exhaustible for Meillassoux*.[19] In other words, mathematical difference (but also what *charts* mathematical *contingency*) can be analysed outside of the subject, indifferent to the subject. It indicates a world "capable of subsisting without any of those aspects that constitute its concreteness *for us*".[20]

[13] Meillassoux, Quentin, *After Finitude: An Essay On the Necessity of Contingency*. Continuum (reprint 2009), p. 34.

[14] Hegel, G.W.F. *The Science of Logic*. Cambridge University Press. 2010, p. 10.

[15] Unless we wish to think the content of all content retrospectively, as determinate negation accumulates its own position. But even this content—of looking back—is itself constructivist.

[16] Ibid., p. 10.

[17] Ibid., p. 10.

[18] Hegel is deeply critical of any philosopher who applies pure forms of thought to figurative substrata such as soul, world and god without previously investigating whether and how these pure forms of thought can determine the thought or thing in itself.

[19] Meillassoux, Quentin, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Continuum (reprint 2009), p. 115.

[20] Ibid., p. 115.

Now, it is obvious to anyone who has read the *Science of Logic* that Hegel wishes to de-substantialise origins and grounds whilst providing a necessary trajectory to the very operation of becoming[21] (not a necessary origin or final cause but the necessity of its own movement; self-cause or the undetermined). Hence, the division between metaphysical and speculative accounts of thinking previously suggested by Meillassoux is ill-deduced regarding Hegelian philosophy. But what appears as really interesting is that, while Meillassoux's cherry on the cake of radical contingency is the *positive* definition, that such designates a positive statement about the absolute, the ability of the natural sciences to know, by way of mathematical discourse, reality in itself, by which I mean our world, the factual world as it is actually produced by Hyperchaos,[22] Hegel's *positive* claim—from out of all this negation—is the postulation that the multi-linear succession of contingency (what makes it determinate, actual and successive (unfolding)) is that its activity includes its *unity* (or its *entirety*) as necessary architecture in which that unfolding unfolds.[23] Hence, if Meillassoux uses intellectual intuition to *deduce non-necessity from contingency* (in other words, the necessity of contingency), Hegel uses intellectual intuition (but more so rational criticality[24]) to *deduce necessity from contingency*.

[21] The attempt to ground is a form of negation.

[22] Meillassoux, Quentin, Time without Becoming (Presentation), Middlesex University, London, 8th May, 2008, p. 12.

[23] The negation of thinking is also "positive, since it generates the universal, and comprehends the particular therein" (S.O.L. p. 10).

[24] We will look into this point later on, but essentially it requires something than Nathan Brown nicely encapsulates; for Hegel the objective logic is the true critique of such (abstract) determinations; not according to the abstract form of the *a priori* as contrasted to the *a posteriori* but in themselves according to their particular content. In other words, there is an immanent critique of the limits of both rationality and empiricism as co-implicated in determinate negation; a speculation rooted in actual determinations and unfoldings (such is the trajectory of the dialectic). This is not a traditionally rationalist *a prioristic* method such as Meillassoux's speculation of absolute contingency, which has no regard for the determinate findings (and implied laws) of the natural, empirical science for example.

# B: Transcendental or Ancestral Time?

## 1: Hegel and Transcendental Time

This brings us to another difference in both Hegel's idealism and Meillassoux's materialism. If Hegel can successfully articulate the *unitary and absolute* characteristic of thought as negative, differential determination, then it is because it is a time both activated as *ideal* in the human (let us call this human-time 'negative'), and it is a time which is essentially *eternalised* (i.e. the doctrine of being, non-being and becoming in Hegel's triad of logical categories locates thought as something eternally suspended between the former two—as becoming). But this becoming is hence more like the 'moving image of eternity' in Plato rather than the endless flux of Heraclitean becoming.[25]

For example, something which has only been touched upon thus far is Hegel's notion of *actuality* (which is also associated with 'determination'; the determining of actual content). This operation is not so much a movement from one finite moment to another, but rather is the "transition" from the infinite to the finite (or possibly—using Deleuzian lingo—the transition from the virtual to the actual). It is this trans-finite characterisation of negation, or even the sublation of finitude itself, which is what Hegel terms *ideal* here. It is in fact the *unification* of this transition in thought (as ideal) which makes it neither finite nor infinite in any *oppositional* sense (i.e. it is trans-finite in a *subjective* sense—'being for self'). In fact, I gather that one of the most sophisticated arguments for the absolute being characterised—in essence—as 'Subjectivity' is that it is the Subject—in all its present capacities and conditions—which can think experience beyond the finite/infinite dyad; it does not see finitude as the negative of infinity; it sublates both by positioning both in the present qua reflection:

> This incomplete reflection has completely before it both determinations of the genuine infinite: the opposition of the finite and infinite, and their

[25] We've talked about this to some extent in our chapter on Graham Harman.

> unity, but it does not bring these two thoughts together; the one inevitably evokes the other, but this reflection lets them only alternate.[26]

Before we discuss the function of this notion, let us read what Hegel himself has to say about it:

> Ideality can be called the *quality* of infinity; but it is essentially the process of *becoming*, and hence a transition — like that of becoming in determinate being — which is now to be indicated. As a sublating of finitude, that is, of finitude as such, and equally of the infinity which is merely its opposite, merely negative, this return into self is *self-relation*, *being*. As this being contains negation it is determinate, but as this negation further is essentially negation of the negation, the self-related negation, it is that *determinate* being which is called *being-for-self*.[27]

So, we accede that *subjectivity* is a specific "transition" or sublation of the categories 'finitude' and 'infinity' as both are in a sense negated as pure categories; the very subjectification of the two in Being is enough for Hegel to claim that this transition is *ideal*; the transition or relation is *qualitative*); they are synthesised or 'thought-through' (as self-relating negativity). In a sense, Being (for self) is that which gives *quality* (determinate quality) to this antithesis of finitude and infinity.

In this sense, Hegel in fact associates what Meillassoux has pejoratively called the *correlational* procedure (of the self-positing of being with thought) as evidence of the Spirits reconciliation of the finite/infinite antitheses (amongst other antitheses) within subjectivity. Subjectivity is also the *positive* reconciliation of *pure negation* (the nothingness determining content) because "it generates the universal, and comprehends the particular therein, and hence is positive".[28] It is this utilisation of subjectivity, as the source of the qualitative actualisations of both the finite and the infinite, and the positive and the negative, that comes up time and time again in *The Science of Logic*. The book can almost be read as containing its own algorithm that is functioning before one's very own ideas. For example:

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[26] Hegel, G.W.F. The Science of Logic. Determinate Being. See; https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hl/hl150.htm.

[27] Hegel, G.W.F. The Science of Logic. Determinate Being. See; https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hl/hl150.htm.

[28] Hegel, G.W.F. *The Science of Logic*. Cambridge University Press. 2010, p. 10.

> The understanding determines, and holds the determination fixed. Reason is *negative* and dialectical, since it dissolves the determinations of the understanding into nothing; it is *positive*, since it generates the universal, and comprehends the particular therein. Just as the understanding is usually taken as something separate from reason in general, so also dialectical reason is taken as something separate from *positive* reason. In its truth reason is, however, Spirit, which is higher than both reason bound to the understanding and understanding bound to reason. It is the *negative*, that which constitutes the quality of both the dialectical reason and the understanding: it *negates* the simple, thereby *posits* the determinate difference of the understanding; but it equally dissolves this difference, and so it is dialectical. But spirit does not stay at the nothing of this result but is in it rather equally *positive*, and thereby restores the first simplicity, but as universal, such as it is concrete in itself; a given particular is not subsumed under this universal but, on the contrary, it has already been determined together with the determining of the difference and the dissolution of this determining. This spiritual movement, which in its simplicity gives itself its determinateness, and in this determinateness gives itself its self-equality this movement, which is thus the immanent development of the concept, is the absolute method of the concept, the absolute method of cognition and at the same time the immanent soul of the content.– On this self-constructing path alone, I say, is philosophy capable of being objective, demonstrative science.[29]

So, to conclude this Hegelian reading of conscious-time-as-subjectivity, as both implicated by a notion of the ideal and the eternal (or transfinite), one can see how this functions in a passage like this:

> The understanding determines, and holds the determination fixed. Reason is negative and dialectical, since it dissolves the determinations of the understanding into nothing.[30]

In other words, to correlate is to hold the determination of experience—qua cognition—fixed. It is to make *actual* the abstract flow of becoming. This almost sounds prototypical of a Whiteheadian process

[29] Hegel, G.W.F. *The Science of Logic*. Cambridge University Press. 2010, p. 10.
[30] Ibid., pp. 10–11.

philosophy. Yet, in this determination of the actual, negation takes away everything else in order for this moment to have immediacy as content. Hence, this immediacy is now lacking any other determination other than the one which actualizes (makes-present) the object of understanding. But this invisible negation, of *effacing any prior or ulterior determinations for its particular determination*, is positive for Hegel, in the sense that something is indeed realised in this act (ostensibly, the particular determinate form is universally comprehended in this instance).

Although we have argued that Hegelian positing does not presuppose the object or the act of positing being itself posited in such an instance, a form of determination does ensue; a contradictory form is 'given' (it is up to us to set it in determinate Notions or not) and although we do not fully understand this procedure of giveness in cognition, it is still placed out before us, for the in-itself of negation to further negate 'for us'. And instead of emphasising the facticity of the datum (Meillassoux); that it is utterly contingent, Hegel emphasises this moment of "suspension" as necessary; as the unity of what is incomplete; as the necessity of *the form of contingency* (as opposed to the contingency of form).

Finally, something must be said for Hegel's neo-Platonism; that thought's ideational qualities exhibit the infinite as the "elevation of sensuous conception above the finite into thought".[31] In other words, *thoughts do not die*, or more accurately, the negation included in conception is not allied to merely natural, finite, biological processes (we saw this influence in Brassier) but is harnessed to a nothingness or non-being which lingers as its supernatural quality. For example:

> The infinite is a first elevation of sensuous conception above the finite into thought, the content of which, however, is only nothing, that is, it is expressly in the form of not-being — a flight beyond limited being which does not inwardly collect itself and does not know how to bring the negative back to the positive….yet this must be corrected again by declaring that they are inseparable, that the determination of each lies in the other, by the assertion of their unity.

[31] Hegel, G.W.F. The Science of Logic. Determinate Being. See; https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hl/hl150.htm.

One can now see how *thought*—qua the activation of non-being or nothingness within the triad of Hegel's logical categories (being, non-being, becoming)—is generated through *contradiction par excellence*; "the infinite — in the usual meaning of the spurious infinity — and the *progress to* infinity are the expression of a contradiction which is itself put forward as the final solution".[32] If "essence is contradiction", and perhaps if the object is a self-governed contradiction (our dialectical take on OOO), it is the culmination of this contradictory capacity, its progress, which is itself *thought* for Hegel. I would initially refrain from characterising such thought as *substantial forms* and instead view it more as *the process of the a priori*; the ideational activity that organises conceptual thought in relation to the limits of finite, immediate, natural experience.

### B2: Meillassoux and Ancestral Time

This definition will not work with Meillassoux's speculative materialist philosophy, and I think we can assume why. (1) there is no eternal time but, rather, an infinite time; a time that Hegel might himself call a "bad infinity": one that simply postpones without resolution. I believe this is partly down to Hegel's affirmation of *contradiction* and Meillassoux's assertion of the *principle of noncontradiction*. (2) Human subjectivity is not the qualitative meeting point between an absolutisation of the finite and the infinite because *correlation is itself a finite product within* ancestral or diachronic time. Let us now unpack these opposing concepts in both Hegel and Meillassoux's works.

## C: Hegelian Contradiction Contra Meillassouxian Non-Contradiction

Meillassoux's sentiment about contradiction is antithetical to Hegel's. For Meillassoux, contradiction has its mode of argumentation embedded in theories of sufficient reason (which is precisely what he is trying to

[32] Ibid.

overthrow). For example, Meillassoux reverts to Descartes' argument which states that an all-perfect god must exist because we have the capacity to think such. It would seem that the determination of such a form as God presupposes that its perfection would lie in *existing* (as it would be less-perfect if it were non-existent). But Meillassoux believes that Descartes is conflating the in-itself and the for-us here; why should it be necessary for us (just because we think it)? Surely its necessity should exist *in spite of thought*? Or, to put it differently, we have no grounds for maintaining that this 'necessity', which is for us, is also a necessity in-itself. Hence, Meillassoux has found a neat analogy between Descartes' argument for an absolute, sufficient entity, and *correlationism* (the necessity of any entity lies in its correlation within *being thought)*.

But the more nuanced critique of contradiction comes from Meillassoux's theory that, for something to be both what it is and what it is not (e.g. a contradictory entity), it must efface any real contingency that could change this scenario. For example, if X both exists and does not exist—simultaneously—then there can be nothing to change this scenario; no motor to transform what does not exist into what exists (or vice versa) because they are already both actual, simultaneously existing, facts about the object. In Martin Hagglunds words: "[I]f a contradictory entity existed, it could never become other than itself, since it would already contain its other within itself. If it is contradictory, it could never cease to be but would rather continue to be even in not-being."[33]

The reason Kant wishes to refute Descartes' argument is because this contradictory, presuppositional form of rhetoric implies that one can know that the 'in-itself' is contradictory. But of course Kant, along with Meillasoux, believes that Descartes is simply superimposing the supernatural (or even theological) concept of contradiction as something which precedes the operation of opposing an actual entity with one of its actual predicates. In other words, it is easy to uncover the illusion of contradiction if one starts with a real, empirical entity (triangle) and proposes that it has more or less than three angles, because one would not have a triangle anymore, hence, if we were to refute this non-contradictory

[33] Hagglund, Martin, Radical Atheist Materialism: A Critique of Meillassoux, *The Speculative Turn*, re.press, 2011, p. 117.

fact, then there would actually be nothing left (no triangle) to be contradicted. Contradiction must start with the presupposition of a set of non-contradictory predicates and attributes, and only then oppose them. Descartes only avoids this argument because he posits something so *abstract* in the first place (God or perfection) whereby no-one would even know what the opposite of such use-terms would be.

So, (1) there is no contradiction because such a notion exhausts all contingency between (and determining) all contrary statements (as existence and non-existence supposedly covers all the spectrum of change at one and the same time). (2) the notion that part of an entity's necessary feature is that *it is itself posited in thought* i.e. the positing of the existence of God makes him all the more perfect, as if there *was* a God, it would have to exist in order to be fully perfect (the existence of perfection is a more perfect quality than its non-existence). I assume the contradiction here is that one must posit a perfect entity whilst knowing that it is only perfect *once posited* (therefore we are actually posting a pre-posited *imperfect* entity).

Meillassoux does not solely reach for the principle of *non-contradiction* due to the intellectual failure of contradiction, he also *positively* ascribes non-contradiction, just as Kant did, in order to safeguard the 'in-itself' or noumenal realm. For example, if there is anything that we can say about the noumenal it is that it is non-contradictory; there cannot be simply appearances upon appearances (a contradictory thesis) and purportedly we must have non-contradiction as a prerequisite to think anything at all (i.e. a stable entity that cannot simply change by virtue of contradictions). I assume this links in with Kant's notion that the in-itself *is thinkable* because—as we have already seen—Kant criticised contradiction as an improper and false imposition of opposites that, if proved to be true, would destroy the very credibility of the object being contradicted in the first place. In this sense, we must infer that the 'in-itself' is non-contradictory for it to have any weight or cogency as an impenetrable or withdrawn thing.

But Hegel makes a good point by characterising contradiction itself as necessary and linking such to identity. For something to exist it must be a determinate process or entity already somewhat outside itself or divided. Determination (or becoming) already reaches outside itself as a point yet

to be determined, and we have already gone through all the oscillating manoeuvres that Hegel puts the object through; awareness as something which at once splits the entity into a subject and its *Other*, the subjective–objective axis that orbits every thing that is, the ascension of the preliminary 'in-itself' of the object turning into a 'for us' of knowledge and finally the 'being for itself' of this knowledge once re-positioned and re-integrated into absolute knowledges scope, etc.

But what we are really seeing now is that Hegel's *theory of time* works in the same way; that the movement of time is a contradiction of sorts, and an absolute one at that (as Hegel does not seem to discriminate between different times like Meillassoux does). As we have already stated, "The infinite — in the usual meaning of the spurious infinity — and the progress to infinity are the expression of a contradiction which is itself put forward as the final solution."[34] It is this contradiction itself which provides the motor for the becoming of objects between that of speculative being and non-being for Hegel. It is actually—as Ray Brassier and Slavoj Zizek have pointed out—a theory of de-substantialisation because nothing is ever whole from the start (everything is fundamentally *indeterminate* and hence split from its possible 'self-externalisation' or 'Idea'). In Martin Hagglund's reading of Derrida we see this Hegelian influence:

> Derrida's notion of the 'absolutely' or 'wholly' other (tout autre) does not refer to the positive infinity of the divine but to the radical finitude of every other. Every finite other is absolutely other, not because it is absolutely in itself but, on the contrary, because it can never overcome the alterity of time and never be in itself. As long as it exists, every entity is always becoming other than itself and cannot have any integrity as such.[35]

Now, Meillassoux believes Hegel to be doing an old-fashioned metaphysics of sufficient reason, arguing for the necessity of such and such a being, as opposed to Meillasoux's own brand of speculative thinking

[34] Hegel, G.W.F. The Science of Logic. Determinate Being. See https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hl/hl150.htm.

[35] Hagglund, Martin, Radical Atheist Materialism: A Critique of Meillassoux, *The Speculative Turn*, re.press, 2011, p. 116.

which does not succumb to positing a necessary being. For example, he states in After Finitude:

> (I)t is absolutely necessary that every entity might not exist. This is indeed a speculative thesis, since we are thinking an absolute, but it is not metaphysical, since we are not thinking any thing (any entity) that would be absolute. The absolute is the absolute impossibility of a necessary being.[36]

However, through Hegel's formulation of contradiction, is he not also "thinking an absolute" process while refusing to think of any specific entity "that would be absolute"? Time and time again in Hegel we are confronted with an entity that appears either "naturally" or "dogmatically" substantial and true 'in-itself' but is soon exposed to the power of the negative as a false or abstract figurative substrata such as soul, world and god, which lack any investigation into whether and how these purported pure forms of thought can determine the thought or thing in itself.[37]

As Martin Hagglund shows, doesn't the principle of non-contradiction also exhibit reluctance to change, similar to how Meillassoux's description of contradiction eliminates any real contingency between both its simultaneously existing and non-existing states? For example:

> A non-contradictory entity would be indivisibly present in itself. Thus, it would remove precisely the 'dimension of alterity' that is required for becoming. Contrary to what Meillassoux holds, the movement of becoming cannot consist in the movement from one discrete entity to another, so that 'things must be this, then other than this; they are, then they are not' (70). For one moment to be succeeded by another—which is the minimal condition for any becoming whatsoever—it cannot first be present in itself and then be affected by its own disappearance. A self-present, indivisible moment could never even begin to give way to another moment, since what is indivisible cannot be altered. The succession of time requires not only that each moment be superseded by another moment, but also that

[36] Meillassoux, Quentin, *After Finitude*, p. 60.

[37] I take this description from Nathan Brown: Speculative Idealism, Speculative Materialism—Hegel, Heidegger, Meillassoux. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twMhZVflfgA.

> this alteration be at work from the beginning. Every moment must negate itself and pass away in its very event. If the moment did not immediately negate itself there would be no time, only a presence forever remaining the same.[38]

I believe this passage by Hagglund to be sufficiently Hegelian (qua Derrida) in that it posits contradiction—not as the already-made, positive existence of two opposites contained in a state of "suspension", but rather as the self-division of any claim to the existence of positive substance (let alone two in contradiction to each other). In other words, we are talking about an entity or process (X) which already has inscribed within it its destruction or non-X. And that inclusion of this non-element in fact implicates the 'originary' X in the first place. All entities are simultaneously haunted by the non-being (or nothingness) that co-creates them. Zizek encourages much of the same when he asks us to

> (R)ecognize in (what appears to him as) the overwhelming power of destruction which threatens to obliterate his particular identity, the absolute negativity which forms the very core of his own Self. In short, the subject has to fully identify with the force that threatens to wipe him out: what he feared in fearing death was the negative power of his own Self.[39]

What we have here is not so much the universalisation of contradiction but rather a *subjectification* of sorts; each entity includes within it its own individual (authentic) absence. It is a specific absence that the individual co-creates which gives it an embodied feeling similar to how Heidegger expressed a deep interest in the subject owning his or her death, as an act of authenticity.

However, regarding Hagglund's *materialist* reading of Derrida's 'trace', as the "becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space",[40]Hagglund requires that "time cannot be a virtual power to make

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[38] Hagglund, Martin, Radical Atheist Materialism: A Critique of Meillassoux, *The Speculative Turn*, re.press, 2011, p. 118.

[39] Zizek, Slavoj, Is it Still Possible to be a Hegelian Today? *The Speculative Turn*. re-press, 2011, p. 206.

[40] Hagglund, Martin, Radical Atheist Materialism: A Critique of Meillassoux, *The Speculative Turn*, re.press, 2011, p. 116.

anything happen, since it is irreversible and *dependent on a spatial, material support that restricts its possibilities*".[41] Yet, what Hegel and Meillassoux have in common here is the notion that "contradiction" or "hyper-chaos" have some sort of logical or rational basis beyond that of material inscription. For example, in Meillassoux it is not the intrinsic potentiality of matter (like it is for, say, Aristotle) but the rationalist deduction that even the laws governing matter can change. As for Hegel, yes, contradiction seems to come on the scene as soon as something *exists*; existence is a contradiction between what something immediately is and what something becomes (or its other), but the algorithm of contradiction (if you allow me the term) can itself be posited as a meta-physical term outside of the remit of any one particular existent case of contradiction. In fact, Hegel's contradictory inclusion of being and non-being in his triad of logical categories is precisely this metaphysical-logical account.

What appears interesting here, and what will move us out of the theme of contradiction into the themes of potentiality, contingency and virtuality, is that if Hegel can be seen to adhere to the principle of sufficient reason, in that something necessarily leads to another, without designating this or that entity as the *identity* of this necessity (e.g. Hegel's theory of contradictory unfolding or becoming), then Meillassoux will refuse even this. It is *not* necessary that one thing must lead on to another, regardless of whether this instance appears logical, successive or chaotic because things could just as well stay the same, indefinitely, forever. In Meillassoux's own words:

> To assert … that everything must necessarily perish, would be to assert a proposition that is still metaphysical. Granted, this thesis of the precariousness of everything would no longer claim that a determinate entity is necessary, but it would continue to maintain that a determinate situation is necessary, viz., the destruction of this or that. But this is still to obey the injunction of the principle of reason, according to which there is a necessary reason why this is the case (the eventual destruction of X), rather than otherwise (the endless persistence of X). But we do not see by virtue of what there would be a reason necessitating the possibility of destruction as

[41] Hagglund, Martin, Radical Atheist Materialism: A Critique of Meillassoux, *The Speculative Turn*, re.press, 2011, p. 116.

> opposed to the possibility of persistence. The unequivocal relinquishment of the principle of reason requires us to insist that both the destruction and the perpetual preservation of a determinate entity must equally be able to occur for no reason. Contingency is such that anything might happen, even nothing at all, so that what is, remains as it is.[42]

Surely *this* is the real difference between Hegel and Meillassoux. That, while Hegel dialectically creates and implicates contingency and necessity based on his unification of the empirical and the *a priori* (i.e. contingency is tracked—as soon as it is actualised in the rational human—as a logical possibility with limited, logical outcomes), Meillassoux defines contingency *non-dialectically*, whereby radical "virtuality" is "not dominated by any pre-constituted totality of possibles".[43] Let us not forget that even the human, subjective *a priori* of both Kant and Hegel is *contingent* within Meillassoux's larger setting of the ancestral and hyper-chaos. As we will see later, the *a priori* associated with transcendence is simply seen as but another objective emergence within a hitherto non-conscious (ancestral) time *indifferent* to the former.

However, as someone like Slavoj Zizek notes, it is not as simple as saying that Hegel converts contingency into necessity qua reflection or reason, for the simple reason that this very reflection or reason *is itself contingent on a specific actual unfolding*. As J.N. Findlay used to say—we are always dealing with *this* specific history of world-spirit and not any other:

> (W)hile Hegel undoubtedly thought that the sequence of thought-described in the *Phenomenology*—phases experienced by humanity in the past and recapitulated by Hegel in his own thought-adventures up to and including his own advance to the position of Science in about 1805—was a necessary sequence, he still did not think it the only possible necessary sequence or pathway to Science, and certainly not the pathway to Science that would be taken by men in the future, or that might have been taken in other cultural and historical settings. For Hegel makes plain by his practice that he does not confuse the necessary with the unique, that he does

[42] Meillassoux, Quentin, *After Finitude*, pp. 62–63.

[43] Meillassoux, Quentin, Potentiality and Virtuality, pp. 231–232.

> not identify a necessary sequence of phases with the *only* possible sequence that can be taken.[44]

Furthermore, Hegel's retroactive inclination towards thought's process of identification—as the owl of Minerva—also allows the 'event' or moment of realisation to change the history that came before it. We reflect upon the history of art in a different way after Duchamps 'fountain' or the history of music after Schoenberg's atonal system, etc. Personally, I believe this last point gets its weight from Hegel's notion of consciousness as itself independent from nature, so that the history of thought can reconstruct itself again and again in a quasi-autonomous fashion. In Evald Ilyenkov's words:

> Idealism, and at the same time specifically Hegel's dialectics, begin later, when Hegel tackles the question of the motive forces of the development of the 'kingdom of the spirit', the sphere of consciousness. The specific feature of Hegelian philosophy is the fact that the idea of development is fully applied only to the phenomena of consciousness.[45]

For Zizek, this type of dialectical implication of the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*—or the analytic and the synthetic—is not itself triumphed by the principle of sufficient reason *as such*. What we have is rather a more singular manifestation of the two. The "passage from contingency to necessity … marks the passage … of a pure tautology"; "there is a story to be told *if* there is a story to be told. That is to say, *if* there is a story to be told (if, due to contingency, a story emerges at the end), *then* this story will appear as necessary. Yes, the story is necessary, but its necessity itself is contingent."[46]

The conclusion that both Hegel and Zizek seem to warrant from this is that both the necessary unfolding of world-spirit (or world-history)

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[44] Findlay. J.N. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Foreword p. vi Oxford University Press. 1977.

[45] Ilyenkov. The dialectics of the Abstract & the Concrete in Marx's Capital. Chapter 3—Ascent from the Abstract to the Concrete. See https://www.marxists.org/archive/ilyenkov/works/abstract/abstra3b.htm#:~:text=According%20to%20Hegel%2C%20that%20means,to%20the%20concrete%20human%20spirit.

[46] Zizek, Slavoj, Is it Still Possible to be a Hegelian Today? *The Speculative Turn*. re.press, 2011, p. 213.

and the unfolding of the rational mind (as retrospection) are both in fact contingent occurrences of necessity. It is *this* world of necessity and not *that* world. Or, alternatively, with a hint of an ironic, evolutionary undertone, if contingency unfolds for long enough under a set of *actual* (limited) conditions (such as time and space), then the "over-determination", "complexification" or "sophistication" of such contingency itself appears as necessary or sufficient. In Zizek's own words, "Yes, Hegel sublates time in eternity—but this sublation itself has to appear as (hinges on) a contingent temporal event. Yes, Hegel sublates contingency in a universal rational order—but this order itself hinges on a contingent excess."[47] This is what leads Zizek to say that "the Hegelian dialectical process is not such a 'saturated' self-contained necessary Whole, but the open-contingent process through which such a Whole forms itself. In other words, the reproach confuses being with becoming: it perceives as a fixed order of Being (the network of categories) what is for Hegel the process of becoming which, retroactively, engenders its necessity."[48]

Concerning Meillassoux's post-metaphysical materialist ontology, we could perhaps say that, even in the most indeterminate of events; a *radical contingency* beyond that of a set of outcomes based on chance, there still may be a type of Hegelian instantiation whereby a radically contingent being may be able to re-inscribe its past as a necessity for itself (a necessity 'for us'). Like Badiou's *fidelity to an event*, this is a singular (singularity) affair concerning the subject and its retroactive rationale and is *not* premised on the traditionally Hegelian idea that absolute contingency is being filtered through absolute necessity qua the rational subject, that is, as the actual subject, in its particularity, plucks out the eternity and universality of Being through his or her particular synthesis (as determination or presence), mediating the eternal and the present as an ideal (qualitative) moment. In other words, the Meillassouxian (and Badiouian) *subject* does not need to extrapolate or hypostatise itself as mediating opposites (i.e. as in the centre of one giant, generative contradiction between the finite and the infinite, or, contingency and necessity). Meillassoux wants to rationally point to this radical contingency without

[47] Ibid., p. 214.
[48] Ibid., p. 215.

presupposing that *one's positing of it changes anything at all* (contra Hegel's theory of reflection as a type of auto-necessitating act). In other words, without suggesting that this positing is itself necessary or made necessary through a subject or thought or rationality, etc.

This *indifference* that Meillassoux finds is also the indifference of matter, it is the indifference beyond the human thought-world correlation, but it also implies that, if radical contingency does indeed exist, it is an objective fact; it has nothing to do with whether I think this fact or not. I have added nothing to the factiality of radical contingency by simply thinking or stating it. Radical contingency is not 'for us'.

Regarding Hegel, if we attempt to *objectify* his famous *geist* in the same way that Meillassoux objectifies the moment of human transcendence as a radically contingent scenario, then could we suggest that Hegel's dialectical system is not the uncovering or unfolding of what must always be the case (what is implicit in Spirit is simply being explicated through its becoming or existence as if the constant growth or self-externalisation of a single seed which already contains its fate within it) but rather Hegel is simply describing the emergence of necessity itself; the particular spatio-temporal, biological conditions that make (relative) necessity possible to its nature and its inhabitants (as self-correspondence or self-relating negativity)?

This *relative-absolute* principle can be found in Graham Harman's work; all objects are vulnerable to change and material perishing, but the way in which such 'external' determinations of change ensue are in fact "translated" through the objects themselves; the object *a priori* translates any external determination into a sensual organisation of such an encounter (similar to Kant's unity of apperception). A favourite example of my own invention is the capacity of the calculator to *absolutely*—and perhaps even on an *a priori* basis if we are assuming numbers as purely analytic—convert any process, entity or event into a numerical unit, a numerical unit not relative to this or that number or to any physical limitation (let us assume the infinity of Cantorian mathematics like Badiou and Meillassoux). Yet, regardless of this absolute mathematical scope (or translation), the calculator has various physical conditions which must be required for its existence, and if such physical conditions are not met or subsequently destroyed, then such a calculator—as *relative condition* for

the *absolute possibility* of mathematical description—would no longer exist. The Platonist may wish to suggest that the absolute scope of numbers still exists after the destruction of the physical calculator—just as Hegelian logic may still exist or pre-exist Nature or Earth in Hegelian philosophy. But this misses the crucial point; it is the emergence of the one through the other that has any ontological value. It is the *self-externalisation* of Ideas *through Nature* which gives ideation *existence* (Being) and it is only at this point—when necessity is produced through its material instantiation with contingency—that we can speculate on abstractions before or after this singular and specific event. Hence, we must really see Hegel's metaphysics as tracking the emergence of a particular necessity co-implicated through a particular contingency (both having material registers in the cosmos as a singularity).

## D: Hyper-Chaos

The problem with this regarding Meillassoux's work is whether an object's intrinsic unfolding can really be said to be necessary. According to Meillassoux, no it is not, because determination, unfolding, whatever you wish to call it, is not bound by the autonomy or power of its own process. Anything could happen to spontaneously disrupt this form of intrinsic unfolding:

> In every radical novelty, time makes manifest that it does not actualize a germ of the past, but that it brings forth a virtuality which did not pre-exist in any way, in any totality inaccessible to time, its own advent.[49]

A notion of interiority and exteriority needs to come in here; it is not simply that internal unfolding is vulnerable to external destruction (e.g. the obliteration of laws that hold certain phenomena together), but also a more radical position, that the internal progress or linear

[49] Meillassoux, Quentin, Potentiality and Virtuality, p. 235.

determinations of something like Hegelian *dialectical logic*[50] can suddenly refuse its orientation, its own conditions of possibility, such that a process is simply aborted regardless of any metaphysics of external interference.

Now, what is extremely novel in Meillassoux's account of radical contingency is that—as we have already stated—it does not simply pit contingency against necessity but distinguishes between several actual and virtual forms of contingency such as potentiality, change, contingency and virtuality. This is where things become really interesting because any existing (determinate) object will have varying degrees of each of these capacities. For example, a roll of the dice may have a limited potentiality (of six sides) and its chance (rate) is hence "every actualization of a potentiality … on the basis of the initial conditions", and we can readily agree that this could be radically different to alternative, specific entities and the scope carved out by the entities potentiality (e.g. the potentiality of a dice is different to the potentiality of it snowing on Christmas or of someone having a stroke). Yet virtuality remains at full capacity regardless of the possibility rate because, for Meillassoux, virtuality does not abide by the same logic of contingency but of the radical contingency that can destroy or remain indifferent to such chance scenarios. We also get a glimpse at the idea that contingency is itself "a property of an indexed set of cases (not of a case belonging to an indexed set)",[51] which implies that there are different forms of contingency depending on the actuality or virtuality of the object in question. The possible scenario of my dream (or nightmare) tonight is of a different order of contingency from that between the possible cutlery I might use for dinner this evening. In other words, there may be certain scenarios where contingency in the conventional sense does not apply to a certain set of objects (i.e. it is not a property of them).

> Potentialities are the non-actualized cases of an indexed set of possibilities under the condition of a given law (whether aleatory or not). Chance is every actualization of a potentiality for which there is no univocal instance

[50] "In Hegel's logic, each category follows with inexorable immanent-logical necessity from the preceding one". Zizek, Slavoj, Is it Still Possible to be a Hegelian Today? *The Speculative Turn*. re.press, 2011, p. 215.

[51] Ibid., 215.

> of determination on the basis of the initial given conditions. Therefore I will call contingency the property of an indexed set of cases (not of a case belonging to an indexed set) of not itself being a case of a set of sets of cases; and virtuality the property of every set of cases of emerging within a becoming which is not dominated by any pre-constituted totality of possibles.[52]

But this is where Hegel's thesis gains a new radical immanence; that one does not even know the (or its) Big Other, or even the (or its) opposites until something is created which simultaneously incarnates (or activates) the newly produced set of opposites or a newly produced alterity. This is what Slavoj means when he states:

> Therein resides what Hegel calls the 'monstrosity' of Christ: the insertion of Christ between God and man is strictly equivalent to the fact that 'there is no big Other'—Christ is inserted as the singular contingency on which the universal necessity of the 'big Other' itself hinges.[53]

In other words, forget about virtuality, it is the immanent dialectical-materiality of the universe that will notify us of what types of oppositions (or contradictions) may be up for grabs regarding the specific type of material absence (or Nature) which is itself built into that material condition (for Hegel this was the ulterior but necessary concept of 'externality'). For example, how would we understand or even perceive 'hot' and 'cold' outside of the chemical and physical register that is kinetic energy or chemical reaction, or thermal radiation, etc.?

Are we not merely—as Hegel used to say—"entertaining flights of fancy" if we were to speculate beyond this physical, spatio-temporal 'Idea' of internality and externality? Or is Meillassoux's virtuality and radical contingency necessary due to the startling limitations that Hegel's cosmological metaphysics seems to show, especially as it hinges on contingency—at least in the last instance—vis-à-vis *the known* (i.e. cognition), a creeping organicism and a Spirit of the one-All. Meillassoux decentres contingency into a hyper-chaos where even the acknowledgement of such

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[52] Meillassoux, Quentin, Potentiality and Virtuality, *The Speculative Turn*. re.press, 2011.

[53] Zizek, Slavoj, Is it Still Possible to be a Hegelian Today? *The Speculative Turn*. re.press, 2011, p. 219.

a condition through experience (presencing) remains indifferent to its aleatoric whims and where this moment of rational synthesis in the Subject fails to recuperate past and future into a unifying moment of universality (eternity). In other words, the Hegelian Subject is no longer the immediate site for the (centre of the) contradiction between Being and Non-Being because even these two categories are not essentially (sufficiently) distinguished *and* this contradiction 'for us' could change at any moment.

> [T]ime creates the possible at the very moment it makes it come to pass, it brings forth the possible as it does the real, it inserts itself in the very throw of the dice, to bring forth a seventh case, in principle unforeseeable, which breaks with the fixity of potentialities. (P & V)[54]

There is no centre to Meillassouxian hyper-chaos as opposed to the centre presupposed in contradiction; the ability to register both sides neutrally is to somewhat transcend or be situated in the centre of this opposition.

## E: Hegelian Possibility

Yet there is a *critical* aspect of Hegel's philosophy that we have not mentioned yet; Hegelian 'true critique' "subjects the forms of thought to a critique in the particular content of their determinations".[55] Hence, regarding Meillassouxian 'hyper-chaos' or 'virtuality', there is really no basis for such 'forms of thought' in Hegel's method as they are neither essentially *content*-bearing processes (hyper-chaos is not primarily a 'Notion' but a materialism), nor can they be harnessed by a (or their) determinations (as a determination can spontaneously change at any time). As Nathan Brown himself states, Hegel believes that the "contingent experience of thinking unfolds through the necessary movements of

[54] Meillassoux, Quentin, Potentiality and Virtuality, *Collapse II Journal*, 2012, Urbanomic Publishers, p. 74.

[55] Brown, Nathan, Speculative Idealism, Speculative Materialism—Hegel, Heidegger, Meillassoux, see video lecture; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twMhZVflfgA.

its structure".[56] This is Hegel's whole immanentist argument for the origins of thought; as that which negates the purity (or hence pure nothingness) of being, because being has no one determining principle; it is the very absence of determination. Therefore, what can be said 'about' being is really an arbitrary or non-arbitrary determination of being in that instance of instantiation. There is no room in this ontological instantiation for a 'de-determining' principle such as the one found in Meillassoux. We call this form of determination *negation* because thought creates content through reducing or subtracting itself from a non-determinate Being (a pure form of Being that has no qualities; is nothingness) and hence we are really dealing with a double-nothing; the nothingness of pure being and the nothingness inherent in any extrapolation of this initial form (thinking activity). Yet within this ontological assertion is a quasi-tautological proposition, as Brown states: "[O]ntology is a discourse. Insofar as it is a rational discourse, what it can say of being is constrained by what has to be said, and the necessity of what has to be said is drawn from the rational coherence of the contingent process of thinking"; therefore, what can be said of being proves inextricable from the immanent determinations of what has to be said. The "contingent experience of thinking unfolds through the necessary movements of its structure".[57] Therefore, Hegel's absolute idealism rests on two deductions which are antithetical to Meillassoux's philosophy: (1) becoming is the genetic movement of the concept itself; and (2) whatever 'external' or 'natural' contingency we so wish to define in relation to this conceptual becoming is in fact implicated as either thoughts 'other' or complemented as a movement already sublated in thought itself. In other words, *becoming* is idealised as what has to be thought, that is, it is the product of rationality's own framework (or limitation if you so wish). Indeed, one of these frameworks/limitations is the limiting and determining movement of the logic of contradiction. In contradistinction to this, we can then see Meillassoux as a *radical empiricist* because he is denying both the *necessity* and the *necessary pattern of* thought in favour of the inexplicability of empirical laws (or nature) found in his radical re-reading of Hume's

[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.

problem of induction. In other words, Meillassoux turns Hume's *epistemological* scepticism concerning the apparent lack of any causal necessity in nature into an *ontological* argument for the non-existence of any sufficient or necessary law or ground anywhere, ever. But let us remember, concerning Hegel, that experience does not simply abide by the laws of reason (as in Kant) but shows us that both the laws of nature and the laws of reason (*a priori*) are themselves processual becomings; they are an ongoing, transforming activity. Seeing the former affect the latter (and vice versa) is what becomes the most decisive and novel step in Hegel's philosophy after the shadow of Kant. Hence, insofar as thought keeps up (or keeps track) with what it experiences, the conditions of possibility *empirically*—and the conditions of possibility *rationally*—could be regarded as radically contingent. It is simply their *joint commensuration through contingency* which makes both appear stable and logical. In other words, experience is precisely the singularly unique coming together of a certain form of contingency and a certain logical framework derived from that contingency (as *singularity*, for instance).

What seems to be at fault with Hegel, however, is the way in which contingency is *subordinated* to the necessity of rational thinking; instead of "exposing the necessity of rationality to the contingency of what happens" (and also what does not happen—as in Meillassoux's case), it is instead encouraged to "retroactively derive the necessity of rationality from its contingent movement".[58]

This seems to come from Hegel's reading of *possibility as something actual*; possibility is something gauged in the present. The possibility that I could fall over in a skating rink at the time of ice skating is different from the possibility of falling over (or tumbling) in outer-space as an astronaut in a dream I will have the following day. One has a set of possibilities substantialised from the get-go, the other has a set of virtual-actual possibilities which furthermore are set in a different space of actualities (the non-gravitational possibility of outer-space). In other words, *contingency is dependent on the actuality of the initial possibilities displayed*. But what or who can give us an exhaustive (and distinctive) account of all actual initial possibilities in any given scenario? What I

[58] Ibid.

think Meillassoux is saying is that there is a radical difference between the actual set of possibilities ostensibly designated in rational thought, and the actual set of *material* scenarios that cannot be harnessed to such thought. What Hegel is really asserting here is the *compromise* (or, less pejoratively, *unity*) between *possibility and actuality* qua the form of human rational experience (or what Brown calls 'rationalist empiricism'[59]), yet whether possibility can be *sustained* through actuality, and whether the sole paradigm of this theory should rest on human experience, is up for debate. The hidden *tautology* behind Hegel's proposition here is that he already actualises possibility (experience presents a *determination* in this sense) so that whatever unfolds from that actual possibility can be traced back to actual circumstances and hence proved to be necessary. But not all possibilities are actual, and not all possibilities exists within a 'set' (see Badiou for the notion that an *event* cannot be exhausted by all of its prescribed variants[60]).

Concerning Hegelian metaphysics, if possibility is itself actualised, then every result of this possibility can be deemed a retroactive necessity; it had to happen that way due to the actuality of the scenario in play, that is, it was a necessary consequence of the former, it is what is explicated in what was implicit, etc. This is not only idealist but somewhat naive; because there is even the *existence of possibility* in the first place (or a concept of possibility) this means that it is *necessary already* (just as Kant affirms the necessity of the 'I' in synthetic production because it is what structures our experience *regardless* of how we wish to then proceed with the investigation or critique of this experience).

Ironically, when Hegel turns to the final result of his tautological determination of variants in the present, this is when the purely formal possibility (that X will *possibly* cause Y) becomes a *real possibility* (Y has *in fact* emerged as caused by X), and this real possibility has nothing to do with the *speculatively real* possibility that could act as some resistance to such an idealist enslavement of possibility (in both its radical and non-radical forms). Rather, it is the "real possibility that constitutes the totality of conditions for a fact to be the case", hence, "when all the conditions of a

[59] See Brown, Nathan, Rationalist Empiricism, Fordham University Press, 2021.

[60] Badiou, Alain, Being and Event, Continuum, 2005 edition.

fact are at hand, the fact steps into concrete existence".[61] In other words, the Hegelian tautological disclosure—of the previously implicit necessity of an occurrence based on its subsequent explicit content—is a crystallisation of such possibilities into one scenario that has in fact integrated *all* peripheral possibilities into a condensed present (this is why the present has a certain universality about it; it harbours within it the trace of all previous possibilities through its own singular coming-to-be). This is how Hegel idealises and universalises *actuality*; as the moving image of eternity (to use Plato's description) that *includes* the possible (or absent) becomings of all that failed to be realised in the concrete event of the fact. This is why one should view Hegel's actuality as *absolute actuality*; the ideal and universal unity of contingency and necessity within every particular instance (if we consider experience as this instance). It is this contradiction, antinomy or antagonism (contingency/necessity, finitide/infinity, etc.) that is productive for Hegel; it in fact generates new content (e.g. becoming is the productive generation of the contradiction between being and non-being). However it is not so clear why—because of Hegel's assertion of the indeterminate ground of Being that we previously talked about—that all actual content must therefore present to us *being qua being* as *emergence* in all of these (human) particular points of actuality.

Yet, while it is true that I have ascribed a tautological function to Hegel's ontology (and epistemology), it is only operational once experience is there; human consciousness is there—turning abstract contingency into an actual contingency (an actual set of possibilities) and therefore a determinate set of outcomes, and therefore a *necessary* deduction of outcomes from these previous actual sets of possibilities. However, *thought itself is contingent upon human beings* (and if we wish to go down a certain route—nature, and the cosmos, etc.). Hence, **necessity is contingent** (upon such human beings). However, the very limitation (or pejorative totalisation/absolutisation) of necessity is that *it cannot find a way into the non-necessity prior to this contingency because it converts all other radical forms of contingency (Meillassoux) or non-necessity into this necessity*.

[61] Brown, Nathan, Speculative Idealism, Speculative Materialism—Hegel, Heidegger, Meillassoux, see video lecture; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twMhZVflfgA.

## F: The Emergence of the Transcendental within the Ancestral

But what is this speculative area of intrigue beyond conscious necessity? Or should I say, where can it be located? Whatever or wherever it is, according to Meillasoux, *it can be thought*. This may not be the exciting answer that you were hoping for, but nevertheless Meillassoux does allude to the *mystery* of non-necessity (radical contingency) too, through the lacunary blank made manifest through the arche-fossil, which makes-manifest information that was itself essentially non-manifest.[62] He also alludes to a hyper-chaos which—as we have seen—can create and destroy laws in the blink of an eye and even bring about a virtual God and even what we traditionally (theologically) call miracles as 'the contingent, but eternally possible, effect of a Chaos unsubordinated to any law'.[63] But Meillassoux's arguments, although, it has been said, have a confused empirical footing,[64] have their resources in a form of rational argumentation. In other words, Meillassoux is not re-constructing an alternative empirical image of reality (because if that were possible then the correlation wouldn't be as tough as Meillassoux makes out; as we would presumably be thinking outside the correlation in this scenario[65]), but rather formulates a non-empirical indeterminacy that is commensurate with

[62] 'Materials indicating the existence of an ancestral reality or event; one that is anterior to terrestrial life'—see Meillassoux, Quentin, *After Finitude*, 2009, p. 10.

[63] Collapse Volume IV. Urbanomic Press 2008. Concept Horror. Spectral Dilemma Quentin Meillassoux. p. 274.

[64] I mean this in the sense that Adrian Johnston conveys it—"Meillassoux's appeals to science don't constitute a deep and defensible materialist philosophical engagement with properly scientific handlings of physical reality" because he is solely focusing on the distinction between the empirical formulation of laws in Hume (continuity, contiguity, resemblance, cause and effect) and opposing these to the non-empirical 'ontological' potency of hyper-chaos (using his own branch of rationalist rhetoric). See Johnston, Adrian, *Hume's Revenge: A Dieu, Meillassoux*, *The Speculative Turn*, p. 95. But also in the sense that Meillassoux's hyper-chaos must apply some faith in the contingency of an empirical world *over and beyond* any registering of contingency through the rational (contingency as 'the manifold' or the necessary possibilities of contingency which is ascribed to Hegelian thinking, etc.).

[65] Or, a more likely scenario, this new thought would simply be re-correlated into the initial correlation of thought and being.

both the way things are on earth (to us/for us) and commensurate with mathematical formalisation. What does this mean? It means that mathematics can track the in-itself of hyper-chaos. It means there is a realism independent/indifferent to the manifest image which can be charted by mathematics but is also *implicated in the correlation itself* (because the correlation becomes not transcendental but real; a real event that happened in the universe at a particular point in (absolute) time). Hence we can gain insight into the *factiality* of the correlation and award such the objective reality it has long been due. Is then the *manifest image* not, consequently, absolutely real? No, because what we are proposing is that the facticity of something (its absolute radical contingency) is absolutely real and objective, not *this or that entity* that poorly expresses this truth (let alone the experiencing human who desires for nothing more than the *illusion of stability* in the form of the phenomenologically given act of intentionality). The best the naive folk-psychological subject can do is simply state the 'factical' quality of this; that something 'is', without recourse to any theory of identity (which would have to rely—at least implicitly—on a theory of necessity/sufficient reason).

It is the absolute foothold of this diachronic hyper-chaotic time—from which human existence comes out of yet is barred from—which is of interest here. The possibility of ridding ourselves from our transcendentally encoded experience to access this absolute hyper-chaos, in which the facticity of every entity is exposed, is about as un-viable as the possibility to think Cantorian infinity using a predisposed notion of possibility centred on the rolling of dice. But Meillassoux gets close; he conceives Fichte's first principle, the I = I, (the relation of the I to itself), as essentially *ungrounded*, which in Meillassoux's vocabulary, means that he has made it essentially 'factual'. Meillassoux could be seen to side with the ungrounded activity of Hegelian thinking, yet Hegel's characterisation of this activity as both "self-activity" (the absolute autonomy of thinking with being) and as retroactively converted into a necessity, is dismissed as overly idealistic. Can Meillassoux tell us anything about this absolute time prior to a human 'given' time without enacting a performative contradiction?

In Anna Longo's paper entitled The Genesis of the Transcendental,[66] she states that:

> Meillassoux's explication of the genesis of the transcendental implies the impossibility of any project of naturalization of thought. In fact his strategy consists in declaring and demonstrating that thought is a contingent fact whose conditions cannot be found in nature: it is the result of non-necessary change of these laws. In other words, the appearance of thought is a pure contingency as it cannot be considered as an improbable outcome of the finite possible implied within the laws of the physics of our actual world. The emergence of thought is an event whose probability is in itself not calculable, since it depends on an unpredictable change of these same laws (that cannot be predicted according to the laws).[67]

In an attempt to answer my previous question, it seems that Meillassoux is able to say *a lot*. For example, that such a time invokes "a contingency so radical that it would incorporate all conceivable futures of the present laws, *including that consisting in the absence of their modification*".[68] He can also rationally assert that this is a time that does not require nature and its putative laws or the "physics of our actual world".[69] He can also say that this unreason is itself *a rational discovery*; no longer do nature's laws mock reasons limited scope ("reason does not seem to be capable of prohibiting *a priori* that which goes against the purely logical necessity of non-contradiction"[70] yet it finds—through the thesis of unreason—something rationally deducible[71]). Following this he can assert the absolute existence of non-contradiction. He can also

[66] Longo, Anna, The Genesis of the Transcendental. How to Make a Realist Speculation out of Absolute Idealism. Methode. Analytic Perspectives. pp. 150–176. Martin Hagglund has also accused Meillassoux of conflating the empirical and the transcendental; construing the empirical problem of the birth of living organisms as analogous to the ontological problem of the coming into being of giveness as such (Hagglund, Martin, *Speculative Turn*, 2012, pg 117).

[67] Ibid.

[68] Meillassoux, Quentin, Potentiality and Virtuality, p. 226. *The Speculative Turn*, re.press 2011.

[69] Longo, Anna, The Genesis of the Transcendental How to Make a Realist Speculation out of Absolute Idealism. Methode. Analytic Perspectives. pp. 150–176.

[70] Meillassoux, Quentin, Potentiality and Virtuality, p. 226. *The Speculative Turn*, re.press, 2011.

[71] See Meillassoux, Quentin, Potentiality and Virtuality, *The Speculative Turn*, re.press 2011. It is "not the *incapacity* of reason to discern hidden potentialities, but, quite on the contrary, the capacity of reason to accede to the ineffectivity of an All of potentialities which would pre-exist their emergence".

say—if we follow his argument convincingly—that *human time* is but a factical creation; not just asserting the objective advent of human beings (empirically) but the objective advent of (ontological) human time (what some have called the finite, transcendental 'horizon of temporality'). Of course, retro-activating the ancestral realm through the transcendental is impossible; "the problem of the ancestral cannot be thought from the transcendental viewpoint because it concerns the space-time in which transcendental subjects went from not-taking-place to taking-place—and hence concerns the space-time anterior to spatiotemporal forms of representation".[72] Yet the ancestral realm's *unilateral* status is something that should not be dismissed, as we have seen in elements of Graham Harman's vicarious causation and Ray Brassier's flirtation with extinction, and the work of Francois Laruelle. Sciences' newfound realism, encouraged by Meillassoux, is that it can produce two claims; (1) transcendental claims qua a collective of rational subjects (i.e. it attempts to temporalise and spatialise the emergence of living bodies and even the "taking-place of the transcendental", which is itself a hypocritical act[73]), but it can also make (2) non-transcendental claims such as the "measurement of radioactive decay in an isotope or the luminous emission of a star that informs us as to the date of its formation".[74] Lastly, as Peter Hallward notices, Meillassoux also argues that the *marrying of absolute contingency with mathematics* involves the claim that, not only is "mathematized empirical science applicable to mind-independent facts of our actually existing world", but also (as a result of Cantor's de-totalisation of number) that such mathematisation "states something about the structure of the possible as such, rather than about this or that possible reality. It is a matter of asserting that the possible as such, rather than this or that possible entity, must necessarily be un-totalizable".[75]

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[72] See Hagglund, Martin, *The Speculative Turn*, 2012, p. 117.

[73] Science commonly tries to use the subjective, transcendental constitution of time and expand it upon putative conditions beyond or prior to it (such as attempting to spatio-temporalise the ancestral realm as identical to human, conscious time).

[74] Meillassoux, Quentin, *After Finitude*, p. 9–11.

[75] Hallward, Peter, Anything is Possible: A Reading of Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude*, p. 135 (*The Speculative Turn*, 2011).

Yet, similar to the Hegelian manoeuvre, does Meillassoux not *positively* ascribe hyper-chaos through affirming its nothingness (negation)? For example, in Meillassoux's essay, Potentiality and Virtuality, he writes:

> There is nothing beneath or beyond the manifest gratuitousness of the given—nothing but the limitless and lawless power of its destruction, emergence, or persistence.[76]

Yet this 'nothingness' can be conceived as fundamentally *resistant* to forms of givenness such as that found in the human correlation between being and thought. If this nothingness did not have a positive or resistant side, then we could not make the distinction between phenomenal time and *non*-phenomenal (absolute) time. We must also remember that Hegelian philosophy does not reflect a series of *naturalist* causal connections analysed in Humean induction but a series of *spiritual-logical* causal sequences that have been known to jump quite sporadically (like Meillassoux's hyper-chaos) from one stage to the next (consider the lack of any historical analysis of mediaeval times in Hegel; presumably the 'Idea' had not developed over that time!).

If Meillassoux is correct, he also points out a law which even hyper-chaos cannot efface; the *law of non-contradiction*. We have spoken about this concept in-length in the above section, but the irony here is that, if Kant utilises the principle of non-contradiction to deduce that there is indeed a noumenal realm that withstands both the absolutisation of the 'for us' into the 'for itself' of say Descartes God (where God is fully identifiable and indeed positable in thought), and counters the post-Kantian inclination to place further phenomena behind the phenomenal realm (which is itself a contradiction), then Meillassoux re-characterises the principle of non-contradiction to imply the radical in-itself of contingency in excess of the phenomenal realm. In fact, it would be an interesting experiment to show how Meillassoux's radical contingency is mobilised in the same manner to which Kant mobilises noumena. We have already heard the argument that—(1) if entities were contradictory, then they would lack the real contingency to 'be other than' what they

[76] Meillassoux, Quentin, Potentiality and Virtuality, p. 226. *The Speculative Turn*, re.press 2011.

are, and (2) that if an entity is contradictory, then it would follow that *it could be both necessary and contingent* (which is of course what Meillassoux does not want). In fact, this is precisely what Hegel wants; contradiction is a germ that moves outwards, collecting and integrating all of its antagonistic and reconciliatory content. In this sense *contradiction is determinate* (i.e. it moves!) yet at its basis is a necessary formula (i.e. the presuppositional content necessarily produced by the two contradictory poles). An example of this can be found in *phenomena themselves* for Hegel; they are of course a kind of contingent, historical fact (when viewed from the side of empirical datum) but when viewed from the 'inside' as the development of thoughts' own necessary unfolding (think of thought as a specific medium with foreseeable, logical horizons) then what we are faced with is the application of *a priori* form and organisation, which is not contingent but necessary; it is wholly necessary that thoughts' logical and analytic capacities abide by its necessary a priori structure (just as it is necessary that a conventional clock registers time in seconds, regardless of what power of contingency might come its way).

Ironically, if—as we have explicated—Hegel requires experience to be the *actualised instance of eternity*—as a sort of *ideal equivocation between being and non-being* (the disclosure of the concrete contradiction between simultaneous being and non-being)—then Meillassoux similarly requires *idealising the instant* because—as we have seen—Meillassoux requires instants to have the capacity to change into what they are not. If instants could *not* do this (i.e. if there were no instant) then we are back to a kind of monistic becoming which determines itself as either one giant future-oriented trajectory, or, as the dialectical unfolding of the determination activated through the *contradiction* of being and non-being (or even the simultaneity of the past and the future in the present, if you wish). In other words, what *is* contingency when you take out of the equation the facticity (and spontaneity) of the instant? Or, where is the agency of the indeterminate if one were to saturate Meillassoux's instant into a pure duration (like Bergson)? *This* is why the principle of non-contradiction is so important to Meillassoux and is the only thing exempt from the omnipresence of hyper-chaos.

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# 5

# Iain Hamilton Grant: Naturphilosophie or the Hegelian Philosophy of Nature?

## Which Hegel?

In this chapter, we will be looking at Hegel's "sublation of becoming" through an eternal and logical "unity of Being and Nothing". Both of these terms (in quotation marks) can be found as sub-chapters in his *Science of Logic*.[1] What this sublation and unity achieves is the integration of any theory of antecedence into "an ideal differentiation within an actual eternity".[2] Nothing can come prior to—or outside of—the categories of Being and Non-Being which not only engulf possible difference and alterity, but also *provide the ground for succession in the first place*; as the passage between (or derivative of) these onto-logical categories. We will also return to Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* to show how Hegel construes Nature as in

[1] 'Sublation of Becoming' and 'Unity of Being and Nothing" can be found in Ch. 1 of The Science of Logic entitled "Being". Hegel, G.W.F. *The Science of Logic*. Cambridge University Press. 2015.

[2] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Mining Conditions: A Response to Harman, The Speculative Turn. re. press, 2011, p. 43.

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fact derivative of more formal and abstract logical principles, as opposed to an *inflationary*, self-replicating theory of *Nature within Nature* which Grant seems to empathise with.

## Which Grant?

In this chapter, I will be specifically looking at those essays where Grant cites Hegel in his arguments (mainly as opposition) such as the two essays included in The Speculative Turn books *Mining Conditions* and *Does Nature Stay What-it-is?*[3] I am particularly interested in his notion of *antecedence* which refuses the hypostatisation of the past as coeval or as recuperable in the correlation of Thinking and Being a' la Hegel. This is what occupies the first section titled *Anteriority and Actuality*. After analysing Grant's anteriority in terms of a non-recoverable negativity (a "negative dialectics" if you will), we must ask ourselves why this negativity—as the possible "not-being of nature"[4]—resists the *non-being* of Hegelian ontology. This section is entitled 'Non-Being or Powers?' and will take much of its inspiration from a paper of Grant's called 'Nature After Nature'.[5] Our current hypothesis here is that Grant's 'not-being' of nature is concerned with *finite powers* and not an *eternal* view where being and non-being are negotiated in the present (a form of Hegelian 'presentism' concerned with concrete possibility *as thought*).

## A: Anteriority and Actuality

If thinking is not thinking reality, there is not thinking at all.

[3] See *The Speculative Turn*, re.press, 2011, essays 4 and 6 within that volume.

[4] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Nature After Nature, or Naturephilosophical Futurism, Dominik Finkelde & Paul M. Livingston (eds.), *Idealism, Relativism, and Realism: New Essays on Objectivity Beyond the Analytic-Continental Divide*. De Gruyter. pp. 97–112 (2020).

[5] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Nature After Nature, or Naturephilosophical Futurism, Dominik Finkelde & Paul M. Livingston (eds.), *Idealism, Relativism, and Realism: New Essays on Objectivity Beyond the Analytic-Continental Divide*. De Gruyter, pp. 97–112 (2020).

In this one sentence, written in the first paragraph of his response to Graham Harman's accusation of the formers inclination towards philosophical 'undermining', Grant can be seen to radically diverge from what Zizek has called Hegel's "transcendental immanence".[6]

The terms 'transcendental immanence' and 'transcendental materialism' have both been used by Zizek. This evokes a form of transcendence due to the immanence of thought itself; as immanent to the structure of subjective materiality (or as immanent to the "split" constitutive of consciousness in Lacan). This is different from what Ray Brassier has termed 'finite transcendence';[7] an outlook that is essentially 'ekstatic' (Heidegger) because its finite character cannot saturate its experience into what is infinitely knowable or ready-to-hand. Hence, there is always this (negative?) horizon of thought that cannot overreach itself and is projected outwards (phenomenology) as a direct result of human finitude.

Now, why is Grant's statement blasphemous to the Hegelian? Because, understood as Hegelian immanence, thinking and reality are simultaneously implicated at all times, whether in the strong sense (i.e. that reality is determined 'in the last instance' by thought) or in the weak sense (i.e. that the reality which we think (in which we 'determine') is already conceived of as the unfolding of the capital 'I' Idea; the unfolding of logical reality, which is itself genealogically contiguous and continuous with conceptual reality. In other words, Grant swiftly exposes the rhetoric of Hegelianism; reality is either already a logical-conceptual process; *Spirit* (not contingent on what we could call 'phenomenal consciousness'), or, it is justified in the contemporaneity of every new, actualised instant of thought (this has recently been characterised as a space for a radical politics of intervention, event, etc.[8]).

Presumably, it will be—what we will tentatively call—the 'ground' of *Nature* that will be mobilised as this "reality" which must be founded

[6] "Hegel is well aware that there is no Other World in which we would be repaid for our terrestrial losses: transcendence is absolutely immanent, what is 'beyond' finite reality is nothing but the immanent process of its self-overcoming. Hegel's name for this absolute immanence of transcendence is 'absolute negativity'". Zizek, Slavoj, Is it Still Possible to be a Hegelian Today. 2011, pp. 205–6. re.press, 2011.

[7] Brassier, Ray, Nihil Unbound, 2007 (see Part 3: The End of Time).

[8] See, for instance, *Badiou and Hegel: Infinity, Dialectics, Subjectivity*, Jim Vernon and Antonio Calcagno, Lexington Books, 2015.

before any thinking can be said to emerge in Grant. And presumably, the indeterminate activity of thought in Hegelian philosophy will no longer be guaranteed through the presencing of what Hegel called 'the Subject', but will alternatively be actualised in the phenomena of Nature herself; as the natural limits or expressions of a hyper-productivity or dynamism which the subsequent phenomena are naturally tied to.

What already appears interesting here is the insinuation that the Kantian categories of the 'in-itself' and the 'for-us' are reflected in nature, because nature as generative—and nature as actual—are both identified in the naturalisation of phenomena, but also—more speculatively—that the 'for itself'/'in-itself' of independent natural 'objects', and the 'for us' of natural consciousness, *are both products of nature* and hence are reconciled in this recontextualisation of the in-itself and the for-us of nature. As Anna Longo acknowledges:

> Thus, natural products are the limited and determined expressions of Nature as productivity, and since the transcendental structure that allows the subject to represent the objects is a natural product too, then things are available for the subject as they are in themselves. According to Schelling, there is no difference between phenomena and things in themselves, as Natural production are directly the phenomena that the subject is naturally determined to know.[9]

But is this not similar to Hegel's account of nature as exhibiting both logical consistency and the Ideas "Other" or "externality"? In other words, at least preliminarily, Nature is seen as both 'self-externalisation' (form) and that which resists the over-determination of content[10] (and hence it is left behind on Spirit's journey to self-understanding). This is why we can designate both Hegel and Schelling as *objective idealists*. Take for example this passage by Grant (on 'behalf' of Schelling):

[9] Longo, Anna, The Genesis of the Transcendental, p. 160. Methode Journal.

[10] The conceptual mediation of the immediacy of nature into "determinate notions".

> The phenomenon, in other words, does not hover above the thing-in-itself or coat it like a film, but is rather the identity of thing-in-itself and experience.[11]

This passage could be read as purely Hegelian; it is the contradiction between the immediate and naive 'thing in-itself' and the thing 'for us', which is inscribed back into knowledge as *the identity of the difference* between these initial oppositions, and this difference is sublated by the negation (or overcoming) of this difference (through its acknowledgement); identity covers or sublates both the thing in-itself and experience as an attribute of absolute knowing. Towards the end of Hegel's *Phenomenology* it can be said that the *phenomenal* marks this absolute identity of the initial schism.[12]

In this sense, the absolute correlation Hegel makes between subject and object (which is essentially tied to the absolutisation of the categories 'internality' and 'externality', which are dialectically sublated as co-implicated terms) is reiterated as the absolute correlation between *constituting* and *constituted* in Nature. Let us reiterate. For Hegel, thought thinks its own *Becoming*, through the temporal immanence of the unfolding of dialectical Spirit (correlation 1) and, regarding Grant's initial non-conceptual 'reality', if transcendence is anchored back to its naturally constitutive domain (as a sort of expressivism[13] shall we say), then phenomenal and 'noumenal' are restored in the monistic substance or Nature (correlation 2).

Contrary to the entire legacy of post-Marxian Hegelianism, there is no robust concept of *matter* in Hegel's ontology because the concept of matter is too abstract, bare and false; it implies an abstract figurative substrata such as soul, world and god, which lacks any investigation into whether our forms of thought can determine this thought ('matter') or thing in itself. Hegel's immanentist critique of matter refuses that we conflate matter with Nature (or anything else for that matter). For example, Teofilo's stipulation that "matter can be considered in two ways: first, as potency,

[11] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Philosophies of Nature After Schelling, Continuum, 2006, p. 161.

[12] Please note; we do not have to agree with this thesis to see how it is almost identical to the aforementioned passage stated by Grant.

[13] See Deleuze, Gilles, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, Zone Books, 1990.

second, as substratum"[14] would be wholly negated by Hegel as dogmatically making itself exempt from any act of thinking that would orient it otherwise. Could 'matter' even be said to be part of the 'Idea' in this respect, as it foregoes any reconciliation needed for an objective idealism and relapses back to a pre-Kantian dogmatic metaphysics (of quasi-unknowable matter).

In fact, if this type of proto-Schellingianism is meant to be an *objective idealism* because "it includes the idea as part of the real"[15] through conflating the former into the latter then Hegel's objective idealism is achieved through the opposite approach; including *materiality* (immediacy, externality, etc.) as a *prenatal* stage of the Idea's self-development. In Hegel's words; "(T)he being of nature does not correspond to its concept".[16] This suggests that t*here is* an applicable concept for nature, yet all we receive is the negative of this concept; nature *is* the *negative of the concept*. Hence, even in this dialectical negation (even in this element), "nature is a representation of the idea".[17] Regarding Chap. 4 on Meillassoux and Hegel, one can start to feel in Hegel the prioritisation of *necessity* (the developing *a priori* forms) over the contingency (otherness) which will be seen to complement the Idea in many ways; echoing Nietzsche's sentiment, one must affirm all moments of woe if one is to affirm a single moment of joy: the genetics of the Idea must acknowledge what is anterior or exterior to it as that which is it qua its implication. Furthermore, the retroactive operation of necessity must be mentioned again; if logic can logicise the illogical that preceded it, then necessity can convert its opposite into itself too (this is the Hegelian retroactive necessity that Zizek picks up on in many of his writings[18]).

If Grant is inspired by the monistic attitude of Teofilo's assertion that the 'one indivisible being … is the matter in which so many forms are united", then Hegel's rebuttal would be that matter cannot by virtue of itself have any account of *unity*. Unity, whether registered on the Kantian

[14] Bruno, Giordano, *Cause, Principle and Unity*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 65.

[15] "The idealist is additionally realist concerning the ideal". Grant. Iain. *Everything. The Monist*, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 156.

[16] PART II of Hegel's Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences. The Philosophy of Nature. See https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/na/nature.htm.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Zizek, Slavoj, Is it Still Possible to be a Hegelian Today. 2011. re.press, 2011.

level as the unity of apperception, or on the Hegelian level as the insistence that self-relating negativity constitutes itself through the whole,[19] are both transcendentally deduced and not materially. This argument is clear even without taking into account the epistemological/critical problems with conflating matter and form so 'thoughtlessly'.

Through denying the self-sublative element of the ideal over the 'material' or natural in Hegel, and hence by maintaining a level of immanence between the two, Grant and his precursors (Schelling, Bruno, Teofilo) have discovered a *limit to the ideal*, or, in other words, a physical/material *cap* on the levels of potency of nature over its substratum. This is indeed very interesting. As Grant argues:

> If the substratum is eliminated in the interests of potencies, and objects therefore undermined, the substantial unity of the universe is eliminated by the same token. If, conversely, potencies are eliminated in the interests of the substrate, then no differentiation, no formation or information, of this unique substantial continuum may arise. Hence Bruno's conclusion that both substance and potency must be integrally maintained to form the One, Great, self-differentiating Object: it is only 'in the absolute potency and absolute act' that matter is 'all it can be', and only 'as a substance' that 'the whole is one'.[20]

Regarding Meillassoux's work, what we have here is solely the *potentialities* of "the non-actualized cases of an indexed set of possibilities under the conditions of a given law" (which presumably is the absolute law of Nature) as opposed to the *virtuality* of "every set of cases of emerging within a becoming which is not dominated by any pre-constituted totality of possibilities";[21] the non-All. Please note, the "non-All" in both Meillassoux and Zizek is here pitted against the "whole as one" in the prototypical Schellingian metaphysics of Bruno and Teofilo.

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[19] As J.N. Findlay states, Hegel is interested in "the ways in which the concept always aligns itself and leads itself on to one another, and can in-fact be regarded as distinguishable facets of a single all-inclusive universal or concept" (*The Phenomenology*, Foreword, p. vii, 1977).

[20] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Mining Conditions: A Response to Harman, *The Speculative Turn*. re.press, 2011, p. 42.

[21] Meillassoux, Quentin, Potentiality and Virtuality, *The Speculative Turn*, 2011, pp. 231–232.

Hence, in Grant, it is not so much that virtuality (in the Deleuzian and not Meillassouxian sense) is limited to actuality (in fact, this is far from the case, as Grant encourages us to view objects as only "retardations"[22] of the "conditions on which its existence depends; conditions that possibilize it" and hence "do not belong to the object") but rather it is *both actuality and non-actuality that is limited by the material*. Potentiality can only do so much when it is defined in terms of materiality (whether virtual or actual); it is "all it can be"[23] as Giordano Bruno stated.

When it comes to the argument as to whether 'potency' or 'substance' comes first in Bruno's philosophy, what we get in Grant is an implicitly *Hegelian* critique of Bruno; Grant accuses Bruno of "denying the anteriority of potency with respect to substance"[24] and hence "Bruno is simply not anti-Aristotelian enough, because he maintains that there must be a ground to mine in the first place".[25] Is this not the Hegelian move *par excellence*? In other words, to convert any hypostatisation or postulation of a ground of being into a determinate act itself (i.e. 'potency')? This is how we open the Doctrine of Being in Hegel's Science of Logic, as the very critique of ground and hence the assertion of "self-activity" (for Hegel, this 'self-activity' is defined as *thinking* and functions *in contrast* to determinate, external (material) dimensions).

Grant's argument is that, if, theoretically, a ground can be mined (implying the existence of such a ground), then where is such mining located? Is not the mining always located as exceeding the ground? Take, for instance, Grant's refutation of actual, autonomous objects (Harman's thesis). He states:

> Take any object whatsoever, on the Schellingian condition that it is not impossible in nature—a mountain, a phone, an idea, an animal, a hallucination— and ask what is involved in its existence. The conditions on which its existence depends do not belong to that object—they are not "its" condi-

[22] Graham Harman, 'OOO: a first try at some parameters', blog post found at http://doctorzamalek2.wordpress.com/2009/09/04/ooo-a-first-try-at-some-parameters/, 2009.

[23] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Mining Conditions: A Response to Harman, *The Speculative Turn*. re.press, 2011, p. 42.

[24] Ibid., p. 42.

[25] Ibid., p. 42.

> tions, but conditions that possibilize it. Since conditions exceed the object, they are equally the conditions involved in other existing objects, and that cannot therefore be specified as belonging to that object alone, nor as terminating in it. That is, the causes of mountain-formation are also causes of geogony, of ideation, of animals, of fever-dreams and of telecommunications. Were this not the case, then each set of objects would envelop its own, wholly separate universe.[26]

It would seem that the object's natural *limit* in regards to its actuality[27] (i.e. the material limit between the actual and the possible (or productivity and product)) is deified as an *irreducible* dimension in Harmanian object-oriented ontology. While we acknowledge the point Grant is trying to make, it must be noted that there is a difference between an *object being irreducible to its conditions* (which Harman's *vicarious causation* in fact does not fully endorse[28]) and an *object being irreducible to both undermining and overmining* (material processes, phenomena, logic, power, etc.). We could readily refute the former without refuting the latter. For example, can Grant's conditions of possibilisation themselves be reduced upward or downward? If not, then we still have the problem of what the object *is*; whether the object *'stands-in'* for this irreducible possibilisation or whether the object is a unique *culmination* of this irreducible possibilisation. In other words, when Grant states that "the actual involves genesis" and hence "at no point do presently actual objects exhaust the universe", *exhaustion* is here conceived through the register of *temporality* more than *spatiality*; Harman is accused of exhausting the *becoming of* being in actual objects, yet the spatial exhaustion, of *reducing* either being or becoming to submergent *processes* and emergent *actions*,[29] is applied by Grant. This seems in direct opposition to Grant's later remark that "there is no primal

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[26] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Mining Conditions: A Response to Harman, *The Speculative Turn*. re.press, 2011, p. 43.

[27] The material limit between the actual and the possible (or product and productivity).

[28] "Objects must be conceived as autonomous individuals *not entirely disconnected from their components, or from the other things against which they bitterly or happily strike*." Harman, Graham, Aristotle With A Twist, Speculative Medievalisms, Punctum, 2013. p. 238. (my italics).

[29] See p. 42—The lines of serial dependency, stratum upon stratum, that geology uncovers do not rest on anything at all, but are the records of *actions* antecedent in the production of consequents; p. 44.

layer of the world, no ultimate substrate or substance in which everything ultimately rests".[30] In fact, the Heideggerian insight that Harman incorporates into his work, is the oscillation between readiness-to-hand and present-at-hand, which is *not* necessarily an act of disclosure that is *temporal* (especially as Harman designates the temporal exclusively to the *sensual* realm and hence does not apply to real, withdrawn objects).

Now, if "the actual involves genesis" then it is implied that the actuality of the object's form is *extrinsic* and not intrinsic because it includes traces of its external conditions and hence denotes its fundamental continuity and contiguity with all other things. We have already used Harman's notion of *translation* Chap. 1 to argue that—*regardless* of external agency or determination—the object still undergoes changes *as an object* and hence—in a strangely Kantian sense—the object *brings itself to bear* on its (external) encounters with other possible objects. Note that the extrinsic is here *relative* to the object; what is outside of one particular object (as extrinsic) will be a property of another object (which itself has an internality). This is indeed what provides the object-oriented dialectics of real (external) objects encountering one another through their sensual (internal) interfaces. Hence, this is one way of infinitely displacing external genesis into each and every object's internal translation of such (by now, arbitrary) externality.

It is interesting to note here that Hegel's absolutisation of the present, as a "now without before and after"[31]—suspended in an eternity that unfolds itself through *presuppositional movement* rather than directionless becoming—would also endorse a type of intrinsic origin of forms, similar to Harman but described as the unfolding of what was always meant to be (necessity) such as his example of a flower:

> The bud disappears when the blossom breaks through, and we might say that the former is refuted by the latter; in the same way when the fruit

[30] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Mining Conditions: A Response to Harman, *The Speculative Turn*. re.press, 2011, p. 44. However, we subsequently find out that "mining is not undermining, but uncovering the necessary anteriority for any and all objects" (ibid., p. 45).

[31] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Mining Conditions: A Response to Harman, *The Speculative Turn*. re.press, 2011, p. 43.

> comes, the blossom may be explained to be a false form of the plant's existence, for the fruit appears as its true nature in place of the blossom. The ceaseless activity of their own inherent nature makes these stages moments of an organic unity, where they not merely do not contradict one another, but where one is as necessary as the other; and constitutes thereby the life of the whole.[32]

In fact, Hegel's metaphysical inclinations here are not without physical merit. For example, if there were to be an actualisation which produces its own conditions of possibility; let us take the example of the *Big Bang*, or even the particular conditions of *tellurian* spatio-temporality (the space and time that includes the birth and death of all natural organisms on earth). Then, in a sense, the very materiality of such space-time includes within it the coordinates for life and death (as we know it) and hence Hegel's activation of the two categories of Being and Non-Being (qua Becoming) are indeed absolutised in this event or object we call earth; there is no anteriority to the causa sui production of its own internal conditions of possibility (the argument for the origin of form is hence necessarily intrinsic in this case; the absolute form of reality). Grant will, however, accuse this line of argumentation as incorporating anteriority into substance ("suggesting a topological asymmetry between container and contained"[33]) as opposed to allowing anteriority to remain extrinsic to substance.

That "the lines of serial dependency, stratum upon stratum, that geology uncovers do not rest on anything at all, but are the records of actions antecedent in the production of consequents"[34] is something that I do not believe Hegel would deny. After all, actions prior to the production of consequents are just another way of preserving the principle of sufficient reason:

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[32] Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. 1977. Introduction.

[33] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Mining Conditions: A Response to Harman, *The Speculative Turn*. re.press, 2011, p. 44.

[34] Ibid., p. 44.

> The idea is that everything not a sufficient ground or reason of itself—everything conditioned—must have an external sufficient or complete ground or reason, or an unconditioned ground.[35]

In this definition, actions produce consequents without assuming a final ground (vulnerable to Grant's anteriority) but rather an *unconditioned ground*; an anteriority that gets lost in itself and—in the process—deconstructs/desubstantialises its own logic of succession.

Yet, what Grant's geological example is missing is precisely just what happens once succession is repeated or reflected upon (ideal synthesis in Hegel); that the actuality of a repetition is offered-up into a new context which now situates the repetition within a past, present and future. Hence, within this ideal register, no antecedent occurrence is exempt from *always already* being within a more all-encompassing space-time (or eternity) that converts the anterior moment into the centre of a mediation. In other words, Hegel would readily admit that there was a time before humans (his philosophy of nature attests to this already), it is just that such a time is not one that has *found the Idea of itself yet*; it lacks the reflection that is required in order to view itself in the image of the present. Therefore, its processes cannot offer up any content to us; the being of nature does not correspond to anything yet (i.e. its concept). It is thus suspended in an (ancestral?) time that has no conditions of mediation: "Nature in itself in the idea, is divine, but in the specific mode by which it is nature it is suspended."[36]

That this mediation requires *human thought*, regardless of whether we infer that such moments can still be cogent outside of human consciousness, is the problem of *correlationism* and hence Grant's critique of Hegel's decision to absolutise anteriority through ideal mediation implies a speculative gesture outside of the correlation of thought and being.

However, we don't have the Meillassouxian problem here of denoting an *ancestral realm* before 'givenness' as such (the transcendental

[35] See Jim Kreines; https://www1.cmc.edu/pages/faculty/jkreines/metaphilosophy_copy(1).htm#:~:text=This%20is%20essentially%20the%20%E2%80%9Cprinciple,reason%2C%20or%20an%20unconditioned%20ground.

[36] Hegel. G.W.F. PART II of Hegel's Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences. The Philosophy of Nature. See https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/na/nature.htm.

constitution of phenomena) because "a series or process of grounding with respect to its consequent" is posited by Grant, which suggests a process at least commensurate (if not identical) with experience. This geological *time* is the time of the earth (geology) and the earth archives both geological and biological "lines of serial dependency".[37] Contrary to Meillassoux's lacunary gap between the manifest and the non-manifest, Grant gives us an ontological bifurcation between product and productivity:

> The geology lesson therefore teaches that objects or substantial forms depend on an anteriority always more extensive than them, and that such anteriority is always the domain of production.[38]

Grant's project is therefore looking to "uncover the necessary anteriority for any and all objects" through the disclosure of the "constancy of production" surplus to the ostensible self-sufficiency and exhaustible actuality of the object. The *unbinding* of the anterior and the posterior in this description of groundless production is important here; to relinquish the relativisation (or totalisation/eternalisation) of past and future for a past that is always *prior to* the Hegelian implication of the two through an interconnecting, all-subsuming present. This description gives anteriority a generative effect which is not simply subsumed into the product it makes (whether, mineral, vegetable, animal or even planet) and it allows *becoming* (similar to Meillassoux in some ways) to actually have some agency as opposed to its subsumption into *being* as a minor derivative process. Nature is contingent; its forms are contingent upon a groundless ground that in no way implies contradiction or the re-inscription of contingency into the fixed being of non-temporal indeterminateness (Hegel and Fichte's Absolute).

Due to the unfeasability of separating becoming from being ("it cannot be other-than-being that becomes, or becoming would *not be* at all"), Grant gives us an *asymmetrical* hypothesis; "Powers are inseparable from their products; if no products, then there are no powers, *but not the*

[37] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Mining Conditions: A Response to Harman, *The Speculative Turn*. re.press, 2011, p. 44.

[38] Ibid., p. 45.

*reverse*".[39] This comes across as a special form of Hegelian negation with no reconciliatory remainder. For instance, as Grant makes clear, it is not objects that ground the powers, nor powers that ground objects. Instead, powers always challenge the self-substantiality of the 'thing'; a negation that is not integrated back into the present object under change nor displaced onto any other object exhaustively. A negation that never fulfils itself and is not even recognised in its absence (i.e. Hegel's negations—if not integrated/sublated as the development of a concept or object—is at least acknowledged as a *particular* negation or nothingness; the negative content that defines the object in contradistinction). Yet here we have unilateral negativity (or productivity/powers) that cannot be inscribed into any register other than pure generation/productivity *outside* of the correlate of anterior and posterior that *would* have given them substantiality and content. Things do not ground powers but neither do powers ground things; they constantly unground and challenge the illusion of objects intrinsically possessing powers.

One of the tentative conclusions Grant makes from all of this is thus:

1. Being, thought as Aristotelian substance, is supplanted by dynamics; inert matter becomes 'the matter of reciprocity because 'the truth is that we cannot separate being from activity'.
2. Bodies in empty space become an abstraction, ultimately ethically determined, to be replaced by a field ontology. Both consequences together satisfy Faraday's formula towards field theories in physics: 'the substance is composed of its powers'.

Grant refuses the metaphysical notion that 'matter' is contingent in contradistinction to (immaterial?) necessity, such as Fichte's initial claims that "the contradiction I=¬I expresses the encounter of the necessity of activity on the part of the I and the power of contingency on the part of nature, which counters it.[40] One of the formal outcomes for this dualistic misconstrual of contingency and necessity is that "the reason (or necessity)

[39] Ibid., p. 46.

[40] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Does Nature Stay What-is-is? *The Speculative Turn*, 2011. p. 72.

of being cannot be supplied by matter".[41] What does appear interesting in this dualism is the idea that the physics of contingency takes a subordinate role regarding the necessity that restores it somehow. This can of course be seen in Hegel, but as Grant acknowledges, it is Aristotle's *meta*-physics that implies that "physis is only one mode of being".[42] In other words, *Being* may perhaps be able to (theoretically) situate the natural mode of being as only a *particular* within it. Although this account of *Being* still leaves out some non-actualised remainder that transcends all of its particulars, it does however insinuate a possible link with field-theories in physics; that material states are "*regional* turbulences in flows and counterflows of energy" and hence "'matter as such is characterised not by the ground-function, but rather by precisely its regionality, its finitude".[43] Yet, separating Being from its regional states commits the cardinal sin of *separating being from activity* again.

As Christina Schneider states, the function of field ontology is to "make possible the framing of ontologies without 'substrata', bare particulars, and primitive particularizers".[44] So how does Grant resolve this issue? Grant states that "if 'material states' are regional turbulences in flows and counterflows of energy, then 'matter' can no longer maintain its ontological role as ground—the basis of beings—while 'ground', by contrast, has nothing substance-like about it, but consists instead of *powers*".[45] Yet if we—like Heidegger—cross out Being (for activity or productivity), are we not *including the negation within it* (as a Hegelian move par excellence?). Even in Fichte's work, the decision to *equate being with activity* makes being merely a derivative concept; "a concept derived … through counter-position to activity, and hence as a merely negative concept".[46] Contrary to Hegel's project, whereby the determination and "total fact" of the actual, concrete moment draws all determinations into a single, unitary and universally structured whole of being (being-in-the-last-instance),

[41] Ibid., p. 70.

[42] "Nature is only a genus of Being"—Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1005a35, quoted in Grant, Iain Hamilton, 2011; Ibid., p. 71.

[43] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Does Nature Stay What-is-is? *The Speculative Turn*, 2011, pp. 68–69.

[44] Schneider, Christina, Towards A Field Ontology, Dialectica Vol 60, p. 1. 2006.

[45] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Does Nature Stay What-is-is? *The Speculative Turn*, 2011, pp. 68–69.

[46] Ibid., p. 73.

where is Fichte's negativity displaced? *Anteriority* is a possible, *positive* way of both denying beings self-fulfilling ground (in terms of Leibniz for example[47]) and converting the nothingness that *activity* presupposes of being (being is nothing but activity) into a contingency and anteriority. In this case, it is not activity which therefore negates itself as being but rather it is negating something prior and contingent upon it. This is a wholly different concept. In this instance, negativity does not "self-relate" (Hegel) in the sense of *negating* and *negated* being attracting poles constituting each other absolutely (or correlationally) but rather 'negation' relates to something it cannot recuperate. In purely rationalist terms, this describes the failure of the Principle of Sufficient Reason to exhaust the ground of nature that "cannot be assumed to have exhausted its potentials in its currents state".[48] But surely the Principle of Sufficient Reason fails to exhaust the ground of nature *in any state* for this matter, let alone its current one. In Grant's words:

> At this stage, the problem of ground is formulated in event-terms, not in entity terms. This is instructive, insofar as it asserts that (a) things take place or happen, rather than straightforwardly 'are'; and (b) that the giving of reasons follows *after* these taking-place, or are themselves taking-place. The event-register brings reason-giving into proximity to the causal relations articulated in nature, suggesting that they are not different in kind.[49]

But is this a failure of reason to exhaust nature if we are to assume that reason is part of nature? If we take the road where nature and reason are inextricable, then don't we have a *buffering process*[50] between 'the giving of reasons' and the anteriority that is mined by such reason? This *retroactive* import of reason would be perfectly Hegelian if it wasn't for Hegel's caveat that what is 'grasped' was always implicit logically in its becoming—*subordinating natural grounds for logical grounds* (although Hegel thought

[47] "If something exists, then all of its requisites have been posited"—see section 3:2; https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sufficient-reason/#:~:text=In%20this%20context%2C%20Leibniz%20defines,are%20a%20thing%27s%20sufficient%20reason.

[48] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Does Nature Stay What-is-is? *The Speculative Turn*, 2011, p. 79.

[49] Ibid., p. 79.

[50] See Chap. 2, Politics of The Absolute in this volume.

they were the same in his absolute idealism). By virtue of this *processual* account of 'reason-giving', *anteriority* must always precede such reason-giving acts and hence will not be fully exhausted by it.

There is then an "antecedence that makes material grounds nonrecoverable by reason", and "this antecedence is required in order that there be thought at all". With this, Grant concludes that "the causes of thinking are the same as those of that object *antecedent* to thinking which thinking thinks".[51]

Grant achieves describing this 'irrecoverability' through the first-person phenomenological perspective:

> Consider a mountain: the thinking of this mountain entails (a) that there is already a mountain to be thought, whatever its nature; and (b) that the causes of the existence of the mountain must also be involved in the thinking of the mountain. When thinking attempts to recover the causes of its thinking of the mountain, it reaches two non-finite series that vitiate this project: firstly, the thinking about the mountain is always antecedent to any thinking about the thinking of the mountain, so that the object-thinking is always the product of an actual thinking with which the causal sequence keeps pace in fact, but cannot be recovered in thought in principle. Secondly, in retrospecting the causes of mountain formation, let alone the formation of thought thereupon, or of geology, the track taken by those causes invariably fails to reduce specifically to the object from which the thinking started: the causes of mountain formation are also, that is, involved in speciation, meteorological metastasis, and so on.[52]

Accordingly, "being is antecedent to thinking precisely because if it were not, not only would there be nothing to think, but neither could there be any thinking".[53]

There is a similarity here between the "success of the failure" of consciousness described in Brassier's account of Hegelian 'determinate negation'. For instance, that determinate negation successfully effaces what it determines in order for there to be another instance of compulsive

[51] Ibid., p. 82.

[52] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Does Nature Stay What-is-is? *The Speculative Turn*, 2011. p. 82.

[53] Ibid., p. 82.

negation (ad infinitum). Likewise, Grant states that "it is a necessary truth about nature reasoning about itself that antecedence is non-recoverable",[54] that is, the failure of the principle of sufficient reason regarding the 'non-recoverability' of nature's antecedence is a necessary truth about nature and therefore a successful deduction from the principle of sufficient reason. In fact, we could apply the same sentiment to Meillassoux; that it is the 'Unreason' that exposes the contingency of necessity (or the principle of sufficient reason) that is itself heralded as the capacity of reason.[55]

Back to Grant, not only are physical particulars "themselves ungrounded, specifically because each particular physical determination rests in turn upon antecedent physical determinations",[56] but also, *going forwards* in a sense, any "attempted recovery of antecedence ungrounds physical particulars *for the thinking about them*", that is, for the very reason that thought creates its own subsequent product/object as it thinks. Hence, the ungrounding of all things (the impossibility of integrating antecedence) is not simply the failure to reduce itself to *what it is* but also *what it might become*; "nature is never all it can be".[57] It is not only *thought* that is previously unformed and hence radically immanent in every future scenario, if we accede that nature is fundamentally ungrounded, then "what is ungrounded runs forward as the operations of powers, of *potentia* or productivity".[58] It seems that, if this 'dynamics' of nature cannot be reduced due to anteriority, and it cannot be reduced to actualisation in the present, then this dynamism spills out infinitely through the ripples of the cosmos, hence, this synthetic concept of infinitely becoming and infinitely receding nature "necessarily embraces the entire cosmos".[59]

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[54] Ibid., p. 82.

[55] "The incapacity of reason to discern hidden potentialities … is rather the capacity of reason to accede to the ineffectivity of an All of potentialities which would pre-exist their emergence." Meillassoux, Quentin, Potentiality and Virtuality, in Collapse II. Speculative realism Urbanomic, 2007.

[56] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Does Nature Stay What-is-is? *The Speculative Turn*, 2011. p. 82.

[57] Ibid., p. 83.

[58] Ibid., 83.

[59] Ibid., p. 83.

## B: Non-Being or Powers?

We must also add that, however 'unrecoverable' nature's grounds may be, due to the uncorrelated anteriority that Grant encourages, when nature traces its own history "nature is only completed when nature can be seen to emerge from *what it is not*. In other words, not-being must be the consequence of an investigation into natural history. We must find an origin of nature only if it is the case that nature at some point did not obtain; that there was some not nature at some point."[60]

Yet the emphasis of "not" as opposed to "non" is vital here in my opinion. In order not to fall into the centrifugal logic of Hegelian opposites (being and non-being), we have a 'not' which, although *constitutes* the positivity of nature (which is initially Hegelian in that nothingness is co-constitutive of something (or being)), it is however *not integrated as the opposite of nature* (as part of nature's contradictory essence). Quite simply, the nothingness that constitutes nature is not nothingness but rather *not nature*. Hence, the not-nature is hereby positivised as Other and not Nature's negative (dialectics is hereby overthrown in this gesture).

What this 'not-nature' is (heuristically) defined as is an account of *powers* which Grant revives from Plato:

> A power is a power only if it is resisted by another. If that were not the case, we would be dealing with a power which is non-finite; a power which is not limited by its products. If we imagine a power unlimited by any product, what is it that that power does? The only answer is - absolutely nothing, A power that does absolutely nothing raises the question - is it a power at all. In other words, to posit power entails that there is at least more than one power. There is no single power; this is why the idea that there is some finality in a force - that has a specific result - is mute form the get-go quite simply because if the force or power is coincident with its product then in-fact no power has taken place, no force has been exerted. There must therefore be several forces at the very least. I'm going to claim in-fact that there must be an infinite amount of forces just if there are finite products, since if there

[60] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Nature After Nature, or Naturephilosophical Futurism, Dominik Finkelde & Paul M. Livingston (eds.), Idealism, Relativism, and Realism: New Essays on Objectivity Beyond the Analytic-Continental Divide. De Gruyter. pp. 97–112 (2020).

> were not an infinite amount of force then it could not be the case that finite products would arise at all. The reason being that if we think of a finite quantity of forces, what makes them finite? They have, if you will, a species of exhaustion; they reach a level where they have been wholly converted into things that are.[61]

This account of the finitude and plurality of forces is surely opposed to any Hegelian reading where powers do not ontologically resist one another (as *finite* forces) but *integrate* or negate one another (antagonistic implication; dialectics) as *stages* of the *infinite* expression of *one* 'force'. For Hegel, it is indeed the notion that "a power unlimited by any product"—that is, the pure, indeterminate essence of Being—is indeed *nothing*. Of course, Grant refutes this claim for the very reason that Hegel endorses it; if nothingness for Hegel is indeed a contradictory and hence determinate force, then the 'forces' of determination are perfectly integral (or "coincident") with this nothingness (they are immanent to it). Yet for Grant, if this were to be the case, we cannot really talk of any 'real' powers anterior, outside or (non-dialectically) opposed to it. For instance, Grant states: "[I]f the force or power is coincident with its product then in-fact no power has taken place."[62]

Hence, Grant carves out a non-Hegelian reading whereby the *plurality* of forces is *asserted from the get-go*, without the *ideal unity* presupposed in either the "objective purpose" of organisms, the telos of the Idea and of Nature, and the rational kernel (unity) of the contradiction. Along the same lines, Grant endorses a *non-contradictory finitude* as opposed to Hegelian finitude. Hegelian finitude is itself an *effect of contradiction* (determinate contradiction as a singular form of sublation[63]). For Hegel, contradiction is not static and resolved but a moving process that gradually works itself out (the dialectic). Hence, *human* finitude is the *contradiction of the finite and the infinite* working itself out as indeed a new, third

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[61] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Nature After Nature, or Naturephilosophical Futurism, Dominik Finkelde & Paul M. Livingston (eds.), *Idealism, Relativism, and Realism: New Essays on Objectivity Beyond the Analytic-Continental Divide*. De Gruyter, pp. 97–112 (2020).

[62] Ibid.

[63] "That is what everything finite is: its own sublation." Hegel, G.W. F. *The Encyclopaedia Logic*. Trans. Geraets, Harris, & Suchting. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1991, p. 81.

alternative (the trans-finite). This is because the Subject is not opposed to infinity or finitude in any categorical way but is rather the mediation of such terms.

Nevertheless, Grant's logic runs in a different direction to Hegels (as we have already seen). Powers are plural and finite or there would be no powers at all under this definition. Powers do not fully coincide with their products or there would be no powers left (or no power in the first place), that is, "if the force or power is coincident with its product then in-fact no power has taken place, no force has been exerted". However, the claim that "there must be an infinite amount of forces if there are finite products" implies the choice to *make-infinite* powers over *finite objects*; the subordination of being over becoming (which is of course contrary to Hegel), seems problematic for two reasons:

1. Any attempt to make-infinite a process (of becoming) is victim to the recuperation of infinity into a *totality* where each instance (or particular) contains a *universal* 'property' of infinity within it. Hence, the universality and totality of the infinite is made *commensurate* with the object or form based on the notion that the object or form is a sufficient reflection of this now stable, predictable and internally self-sustaining principle. If there is a truth for Hegel then it is in the *integration* of all variation, difference or possibility, which the notion of the infinite—when circularised or eternalised—complements by becoming *manifest* in the *present* (it has to manifest in the present if it is to be truly infinite; it cannot be exempt from any particular instance). This is why, as Martin Grimsmann and Lutz Hansen acknowledge, "eternity is in the present".[64] Yet this eternal present is deduced from the belief in the *necessary co-implication of all moments*; that each moment has a universal property or quality in common with the next (its quality *participates* in infinity) and hence it is not a dogmatically deduced eternity. Hegel's eternity is *immanently* deduced (even genetically deduced) as opposed to transcendentally deduced. This is Hegel's claim, but of course, the recent trajectory of Cantor, Badiou and

[64] Main thoughts of Hegel's Philosophy. Martin Grimsmann, Lutz Hansen. See https://hegel.net/en/veinl1.htm.

Meillassoux make it clear that a radical reassessment of the (now metaphysical) One-All must be undertaken.

2. Why does the "exhaustion" of an object (its finitude) presuppose an *infinity* of forces? Why couldn't it, rather, simply presuppose that the object's finitude is *less finite* than the forces in question? This is the move that both Timothy Morton and Graham Harman make by formulating large finite quantities such as Morton's 'hyper-objects'; "objects that are so vast in temporal or spatial scale that they far outstrip any human interaction with them".[65] If the forces of global warming far outstrip any local manifestation of it (or any one exemplary object documenting it) then this is not because global warming is infinite. Its finitude is simply less finite (if finitude is defined in temporal but also spatial[66] terms). The same could be said of the earth or even the cosmos; it is not exhausted through the majority of objects within it, but its exhaustion is fully possible. Is this not what Brassier asserts when he describes the extinction of all matter in the cosmos.

> (S)ooner or later both life and mind will have to reckon with the disintegration of the ultimate horizon, when, roughly one trillion, trillion, trillion (101728) years from now, the accelerating expansion of the universe will have disintegrated the fabric of matter itself, terminating the possibility of embodiment. Every star in the universe will have burnt out, plunging the cosmos into a state of absolute darkness and leaving behind nothing but spent husks of collapsed matter. All free matter, whether on planetary surfaces or in interstellar space, will have decayed, eradicating any remnants of life based in protons and chemistry, and erasing every vestige of sentience – irrespective of its physical basis. Finally, in a state cosmologists call 'asymptopia', the stellar corpses littering the empty universe will evaporate into a brief hailstorm of elementary particles. Atoms themselves will cease to exist. Only the implacable gravita-

[65] Graham Harman: Morton's Hyperobjects and the Anthropocene. Video conference; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Id4FF7JO2wU.

[66] A thunderstorm may be a temporary occurrence, relative to the existence of a human being observing it, and it may exhaust itself due to a theory of homeostasis (the return to a type of meteorological equilibrium) but it is not exhausted by the sum total of observers observing it. Its spatial domain is not exhausted even if its temporal domain is exhausted through its 'ending' or return to equilibrium.

> tional expansion will continue, driven by the currently inexplicable force called 'dark energy', which will keep pushing the extinguished universe deeper and deeper into an eternal and unfathomable blackness.[67]

Grant's powers cannot be finite because "they would consist of their exhaustion in their product", hence the infinity of powers is hostile to the eventual exhaustion of those powers themselves, be it in the disintegration of the cosmos or—retroactively—the origins of the cosmos, which presumably would elicit a further antecedent force *inexhausted* in this process of emergence.

Now, it is the opinion of Brassier that the extinction of all matter in the universe (and hence the possibility of embodiment) *unilaterally* destroys the possibility of thinking this termination:

> Extinction is real yet not empirical, since it is not of the order of experience. It is transcendental yet not ideal, since it coincides with the external objectification of thought unfolding at a specific historical juncture.[68]

But for Grant, this extinction must "take place" in the question: "[W]here does the end of the universe occur?". The assumption here is that the recording of the end of the universe is itself either a continuation or a new synthesis of that universe itself. What becomes important for Grant is the *where* and the *who* of the claimant declaring the end of the universe. It would seem that "the claim can only be made from in a nature" if nature is to be characterised as the site in which "a recording, a document, a social phenomenon, an aesthetic phenomenon, a cultural phenomenon, an entity of thought, an idea etc." is made from. Yet this only suggests that nature registers the end of the universe as just as real an occurrence as mind (which we accede to). Yet, it does not mean that this obliteration *stays within nature* as it is registered. It essentially destroys both nature as substrate and nature as activity, terminating the possibility of further registering this event. We accept that even the logic of this termination would itself be terminated, refuting the idea that logic enjoys

[67] Brassier, Ray, *Nihil Unbound*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 228.
[68] Ibid., p. 239.

a degree of independence from nature and/or the material. In Grant's pejorative words—"logic does not inhabit the same world as logic is made of",[69] that is to say, "there is nothing natural about logic".[70]

Now, what Hegel does with logic is interesting in this respect. Hegel believes that logic is ontology; the dictum that *the real is rational and that the rational is real* could just as well be substituted with the term logic. For it is both the formal logical process *and* its incarnation through nature as mechanical, chemical and teleological processes where logic gets its twofold character of condition and determination. In other words, Hegel's logic is different from the more traditional logic before him because the incarnation of logical forms is itself another series of developing logic itself; the logic of form, of actualisation, of sublation, etc. This is how Hegel's logic integrates negation within it; if we imply that nature is the "other" of logic, that is, its negation, logic nevertheless includes this negation within it as a *new determination*. There is much debate over whether nature is subsequently and eventually left behind due to logic's own compulsion for free-activity (as exemplified in human thought), or, whether nature succeeds in reflecting upon itself as *a whole* that consequently cancels mere arbitrary and external causes for a notion of nature as *self-fulfilling* Idea.

Both of these Hegelian manoeuvres, (1) of sedimenting logic as certain strata through nature which eventually takes flight and reflects on its own pure activity (self-consciousness), and (2) of idealising nature itself as a teleological, functional system, still allow logic a room of independence however (explicitly in the first scenario but implicitly in the latter) because it is logic that *fixes* nature as it were. This is what allows Hegel to say that nature is a stage of logic, thereby chronologising logic as encountering its otherness or opposite through *externality* (the history of logic dealing with its own internal contingency and necessity). Grant's problem—with both traditional logic and Hegel's prioritisation of logic in the historical process—other than stripping logic of any nature or "objecthood'"—is that it cannot account for its own genesis *once given material genesis*. In his

[69] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Nature After Nature, or Naturephilosophical Futurism, Dominik Finkelde & Paul M. Livingston (eds.), *Idealism, Relativism, and Realism: New Essays on Objectivity Beyond the Analytic-Continental Divide*. De Gruyter, pp. 97–112 (2020).

[70] Ibid.

example of the 'hyper-egg',[71] he asks "how can the hyper-egg itself be individuated from the origin of all things"; if it is the origin of all things, then *where* can this egg be located? If we manage to separate the hyper-egg from all the things that it is claimed to be the origin of, then *what* is the hyper egg; as distinct from this origin? This is Grant's way of disavowing the notion that, if the universe were to come from absolutely nothing, then there would be no site of genesis, that is, no nature that generates. This claim essentially takes away nature's generative role and simply gives it an actual role; nature is a *product* of this ex nihilo creation. Hence, there is no coming into existence of the universe if that existence or space is *always already part of that universe*.

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I want to explicate an alternative here which uses Hegel's triad of logical categories to show that even logic—devoid of any nature or objecthood—is still itself contingent and brings things into existence. Concerning Hegel's triad of logical categories, we already find that logic is both a contradictory and determinate process in the initial postulation of Being as that which implicates its opposite (Non-Being). The decision to always implicate the negative, of that which is ostensibly positive, is asserted at the get-go for Hegel. Yet neither Being nor Non-Being can be posited by themselves without generating a form of *reduction* (e.g. reducing the negativity inherent in Being, or vice versa) and without generating a form of *determination* (which amounts to the same thing; a negation of abstraction). What appears to co-imply these two rather vague, oppositional categories—of Being and Non-Being—is *Becoming*. It is Becoming which is the Being of negation (as a form of extrapolative determination), but Becoming is also the Non-Being of Being (it is the *negation of* 'pure Being' and not the *Being of* negation).

Now, the question of emergence, actualisation or generation, is conceived differently in Hegel than that of Grant. Hegel's genesis is indeed *logical*, but this is because, if it were not (if it were material or real), it would be susceptible to the kinds of aporias that Grant gets into (chicken–egg

[71] Ibid.

arguments, etc.). In other words, the only formulation of genesis, philosophically speaking, would be one that does not accede to more external grounds; asking questions of the 'material' that cannot be answered due to materiality's *derivative* existence. Yes, here matter is construed as derivative, and this is precisely what Grant dislikes about such onto-*logy*'s. Hence, if matter is derivative of more logical concerns, how does Hegel designate *contingency* in his triad of logical categories? He derives contingency form the notion that Being and Non-Being are not fixed categories ('in-themselves') but are *activated* through Becoming. This means that Becoming is not merely a means of transportation or access from Non-Being to Being (and vice versa) but *activates* the *a priori generic* categories of Being and Non-Being into a *singularity*; *this particular* characterisation or dimension of Being and Non-Being, which is commonly conceived as *material existence*. As Aristotle had already conceived 2,500 years ago, "physis is only one mode of being", yet the other dimensions of Being are not laid out in actuality before us, but activated from the pure virtuality of Being and Non-Being, which necessarily are infinite (there are an infinite amount of ways that Being and Non-Being can become activated through Becoming, hence *infinite Becomings*). In fact, we never get to see a fully self-present givenness or exhaustion of either Being or Non-being. They only exist as virtual capacities intrinsic to the infinite actualisations of such and such Becomings and hence the capacity of Being and Non-Being is in-fact reduced qua the singular actuality/determination of Becoming (what we could call physical spatio-temporality). But can reduction really occur if there was only virtuality there to begin with? No, because every actualization of Becoming is exactly what it is, as an absolute actualisation that has no recourse to external conditions. External conditions do not exist when actuality is absolutised. What is 'outside' the materiality of space (whether as wave, particle, cells, hydrogen, helium, neutrons, dust and cosmic rays, etc.)? An outside of materiality would indeed be the *virtuality* (or potentiality) of the wholly abstract categories of Being and Non-Being, but this virtuality does not obey the dimensionality of the Becoming actualised and hence is not *actually outside* of any Becoming.

This theory, of course, challenges Grant's *anteriority argument* pertaining to nature or the material. The *logical inflationary* theory I find in Hegelian ontology seems to be vaguely endorsed by another of our speculative realists Quentin Meillassoux;

> We can then challenge … the irrationalism that typically accompanies the affirmation of a novelty irreducible to the elements of the situation within which it oc-curs, since such an emergence becomes, on the contrary, the correlate of the rational unthinkability of the All.[72]

Indeed, the novelty of Becoming *can* be reduced to the elements of the situation, precisely because the actualisation of a singular Becoming totalises the correlate of Being and Non-Being. In other words, Being and Non-Being are included as actual, non-traversable poles within the activation process. The activation of material space and time includes within it any life or death, it includes its own finitude (Being and Non-Being) and it might very well include the correlates own destruction such as the material universes' inclusion of its own extinction within it. This correlate does indeed attest to "the rational unthinkability of the all" because we can readily admit that the category of Being (and Non-Being) is not restricted to the mode, dimensionality or actualisation (i.e. Becoming) of Being activated as the material singularity of the cosmos. This is *rationally* deducible if we acknowledge Hegel's rational-logical argument that our lives, what we experience, the history of Spirit, the moving shapes of consciousness, are strictly prohibited to the *Becoming* between the 'in-itself' categories of Being and Non-Being, as we can never access such categories in-themselves or beyond their actual Becoming. Becoming is a *determination*, and there is no way to posit Being or Non-Being without correlating such to a determination (even if it is simply the determination of thought). Yet, regardless of thought, Being cannot be construed empirically outside of the Becoming/actualisation of its non-conceptual determinations such as tellurian (biological, chemical, physical) time and space. These tellurian determinations are simply actual determinations; there is no virtual time and space 'outside' of the tellurian or material dimensions of material reality. There is only another *possible actual* Becoming, which does not exist outside of these conditions but exists as non-temporal-spatial *logical potentiality*. Of course, this logical possibility—pertaining to the *a priori* dialectical logic of Being and Non-Being—if activated—would not be detected

[72] Q. Meillassoux, "Potentiality and Virtuality", in Collapse II. Speculative realism, Urbanomic, March 2007.

by our singular activation. It would be a wholly new material (or non-material) actuality with its own parameters of actual Being and Non-Being. Multiversal? Possibly. Multi-dimensional? Definitely.

It must be stressed, however, that this characterisation of *contingency* in Hegel is *logical* and not material. What is contingent is not the anteriority or dependency of material conditions or Nature. What is contingent is the logical tension between Being and Non-Being; its contingency is derived from logico-mathematical possibility, which, although is harnessed to our singular, actual Becoming, *signifies*—especially after Cantor—inter-worldly possibilities. Think of the difference between actual *possibility* and the *virtual* in Meillassoux; one conforming to laws (of the actual), the other capable of inventing, changing and demolishing laws.

> The notion of virtuality permits us, then, to reverse the signs, making of every radical irruption the manifestation, not of a transcendent principle of becoming (a miracle, the sign of a Creator), but of a time that nothing subtends (an emergence, the sign of the non-All). We can then grasp what is signified by the impossibility of tracing a genealogy of novelties directly to a time before their emergence: not the incapacity of reason to discern hidden potentialities, but, quite on the contrary, the capacity of reason to accede to the ineffectivity of an All of potentialities which would pre-exist their emergence. In every radical novelty, time makes manifest that it does not actualize a germ of the past, but that it brings forth a virtuality which did not pre-exist in any way, in any totality inaccessible to time, its own advent.[73]

It is precisely this Non-All that Hegel discerns as an infinite possibility of Being and Non-Being *beyond* any actual, singular Becoming (our cosmos). Yet, Hegel's big gesture would be to *include Being as a property of every infinite possibility*. Hence, it would be the *One-All* of Being and Non-Beings infinity of unitary actualisations, and not the *Non-All* of Cantorian, Badiouian and Meillassouxian (and even Zizekian) infinite incompleteness.

However opposed this onto-*logical* triad of categories may be to Grant's ungrounded, infinite recess of Nature, they do have one thing in common. Our neo-Hegelian thesis asserts that the *singular* logic of Being and

[73] Ibid.

Non-Being insinuates radially different Becomings, but as we only live in one of those Becomings, our logic is wholly actual and must not be allowed to overreach itself outside of the tellurian or the astronomical. In this sense, *logic cannot be separated from nature*; the logic of progression, succession, non-contradiction, the predictability of premises and conclusions, etc. are all intertwined with the materiality (actuality) of space–time; they conform to it (even quantum formulations). Space and time are not *a priori* but always actual even in their *hypothetical actuality* in mathematical and scientific computation for example. The logic Hegel uses to speculate upon possible different actualisations of the dialectic between Being and Non-Being is still a possibility grounded in the singularity/actuality of *our Becoming*. Another way of saying this is through Grant's pejorative example; that one can only make a claim about the *totality* of the Becoming of our universe (as singularity)—by completing this Becoming and hence by standing outside of it in some sense; "a completed nature is nothing more than a nature outside which its completion stands".[74] Yet where is this space where one designates the end or totality of nature? It must be a localised claim and hence within an environment of nature. Hence, when Hegel deduced the infinity of Becomings, he is doing it precisely in this particular, singular space of Becoming.

In this instance, both Hegel and Grant have something in common; the *ground* in which we declare the end or limits of Nature (e.g. Hegel's special claim that our Becoming is *totalisable* as a singular activation of Being and Non-Being *which included its own type of Being and Non-Being within it (finitude/extinction)*), cannot be eliminated by human thought alone. The premise of the ends or limits of Nature is made exactly by (for Grant) the nature called into question (by humans as natural phenomena if you wish), and for Hegel, it is made by the actuality of the dialectic between Being and Non-Being *which is not primarily a mental or conceptual capacity* but a logical one; a logic that pertains outside of mind (as a logic of nature for example). Hence, both Hegel and Grant oppose the McDowellian 'space of reasons' thesis.

[74] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Nature After Nature, or Naturephilosophical Futurism, Dominik Finkelde & Paul M. Livingston (eds.), *Idealism, Relativism, and Realism: New Essays on Objectivity Beyond the Analytic-Continental Divide*. De Gruyter, pp. 97–112 (2020).

> John McDowell's 'space of reasons' is not a space unless it obtains in the space's existence in-fact the theory of the space of reasons is premised on eliminating. What is that space? It is nature. What is it that makes it necessary that nature be eliminated in order that the space of reasons be exactly what it is? Precisely if the space of reasons is causally responsible both for any nature that can be an inhabitant of that space of reasons, and if therefore the space of reasons is the fundamental determining element of what it is that makes the nature the nature that it is. What then is nature according to McDowell? Nature is nothing more than its own elimination as an action of a rational being. I ask you; what sort of rational being decides to eliminate nature just to make a point?[75]

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[75] Grant, Iain, Hamilton, Symposium: Nature after Nature. Video lecture; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IyGh1ZXnXpE.

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# 6

# Reflections on Object-Oriented Dialectics

My last book *Object-Oriented Dialectics* was interested in a Hegelian reading of what I termed a *tellurian* structure of time, space and nature (on earth), how these features complement one another and host a plethora of object-oriented 'teleonomic' activities (the term 'teleonomic' comes from my reading of Jacques Monod[1]). This was meant to showcase a theory, a topology, of dialectical interactions in which objects emerge, interact with one another and potentially sublate one another using a theory of object-integration (or object-'sublation') found in many of Hegel's musings (i.e. in synthesis, the dialectic, plants and other 'natural kinds'). It rests on a specific and complex Hegelian notion of internal and external in which both terms are modal yet not reducible to one another (I also link Harman's theory of object 'translation' with this dialectical activity). It is in fact because internal cannot be completely reduced to external (and vice versa) that objects exist in the first place in my thesis (objects present the *tension* between the two). Let us reiterate this; "self-determination" can move from internal to external (what Hegel calls "self-externalisation") and external to internal (such as Hegel's musings

[1] Jacques Monod. *Chance and Necessity*. Penguin. 1997.

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C. W. Johns, *Hegel and Speculative Realism*,
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on part and whole in Nature) but there is *nothing that is purely internal nor purely external*. Graham Harman's ontology complements this aspect of Hegel's philosophy because for Harman everything is an object, hence everything has both an internal and external element. The way that Harman preserves the notion that nothing can be purely internal or external is not through Hegel's notion of 'self-externality' as a necessary stage of 'self-determinism', rather, it is in the affirmation of the object as generating a "tension" between a real 'withdrawn' element of the object and a sensual profile of the object. But this is not simply interpreted as *real interior* and *sensual exterior* because the sensual is a form of interiority ("translation") which the object undergoes, and the real may appear as some inaccessible exteriority beyond the way in which an object is specifically (sensually) translated. The way that Harman indirectly answers Hegel's dialectical thinking of inside and outside, whilst discrediting any purely internal or purely external possibility, is by allowing the sensual object to have real qualities and allowing real objects to be affected by the sensual ("allure")[2] whilst simultaneously upholding a non-relational *and* relational element to the object. The sensual and the real infiltrate one another (or are implicated within one another) yet—whilst a new element may be integrated into a real object—this will subsequently provide us with a new non-relational aspect that cannot by definition relate to anything. This point of temporary 'no return' of the object gives that object a type of definitiveness or substance-iality which momentarily prohibits relation and non-relation from completely conflating one another, very similar to how Hegel prohibits any object from becoming pure interiority or pure externality through his dialectical method.

Regarding this unique type of quasi-dualism of the 'categories' internal and internal, we must still remain attentive to the complicit nature of internal and external. In my *tellurian* dialectical topology, any 'outside' (externality) is always vulnerable to another possible 'inside' to be sublated, as natures particulars are sublated into larger sets, kinds and structures of Hegelian Ideas. The internal is also at risk of becoming a

[2] We even find that Harman allows the traditionally interior notion of 'essence' to be infiltrated or co-determined by "outside entities". See Harman, Graham, *The Quadruple Object*. Zer0 Books, Illustrated edition. 2011, p. 106–7.

progressively external repository like the discarded pip of an orange, a subject of only external, mechanical and chemical relations (as Hegel would put it) unless reconstituted by a further teleonomic process.

* * *

This research also insinuates that it is Hegel's modal oscillation of inside and outside (qua sublation/the teleonomic) that provides him with a basis to suggest that 'Ideas' constitute both internal ('mental) states (in the human for example) *and* external ('purposive') "self-fulfilling" systems in nature (as well as being actualised in political organisation and socio-political 'Ideas' such as freedom). My ambitious aim concerning this topic was to debunk the notion that *thinking and being are identical*,[3] as well as the idea that materialism must accompany degrees of consciousness or mind (such as panpsychism). Instead I argue that thought is generated and depends on objects (such as the human object) but that objects are not dependent on thought (this is in fact what Hegel says at the very beginning of *The Phenomenology*):

> The object *is*: it is what is true, or it is the essence. It is, regardless of whether it is known or not: and it remains, even if it is not known, whereas there is no knowledge if the object is not there.[4]

Hence, the *bilateral* claim of thinking's relation to being is rearticulated (at least by me) as a *unilateral* claim whereby thinking is dependent on the being of objects but not vice versa. I believe that Hegel in truth agrees with this point because it is in fact *being* which he believes is intrinsically *logical* (or rational in a certain sense of the word) and is only 'manifest' later in subsequent human thinking ("upon reflection") or the conceptual in general. Conceptuality comes from the development of

[3] Before you say it—yes I know that this is against the original interpretation of Hegel. But let us remember that one could interpret Hegel's identification of thought with being as simply that (i.e. an identification) and not the conflation of the two terms. In Hegel's Logic, he derives from his 'presuppositionless' method that thought thinks being (i.e. as self-determining activity).

[4] G.W.F. Hegel. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford University Press. 1977, p. 59. A. Consciousness: 1: Sense-Certainty: Or The 'This' and 'Meaning'.

logical categories following the subsequent dialectical generation of nature. This "Logical" or "Metaphysical" system

> must then go on to exhibit the self-externalization of purely logical categories in the sensuous shows of nature and in the contingencies which fill space and time … and that it must then study itself returning to itself out of nature's externality, a return which will restate the content of the phenomenology in the form of a real history of spirit.[5]

We view the emergence of thought from nature as a continuation of logical syllogisms and more complex determinations; a form of dialectical logic that existed way before human existence and is reduced to (culminates in) the dialectical logic of thought phases when consciousness emerges as a pertinent force on the planet. This may prefigure the movement from a complex realism of non-phenomenal/non-reducible object–object interactions in nature (Harman's "vicarious causation" and "polypsychism") into the sublatory form of "moving shapes of consciousness" later found in human conscious relations and encounters with objects (an example of this is what Hume called the relations of contiguity, resemblance and cause and effect in the human mind). This suggests that Hegel is the main figure who organises the *plurality* of Harmanian object-encounters (with real 'withdrawn' elements) in pre-human and animal existence, into a language of conceptual categories which Hegel injects into a nature and reality non-reducible to human subjectivity yet nevertheless expressed par excellence in human thought. Harman's dictum 'all relations are on the same footing' is hence sublated logically into 'one relation on the same footing' which is the dialectical relation, which can account for what Hegel terms particularity, singularity and universality, as well as the categories of difference and sameness/identity and even being and non-being. This idea speculates that the human mind emerges from the plurality of non-phenomenal object–object prehensions (evolutionary allure) as a very complex *real object,* which has the capacity to encounter the world sensually ("translation") and (importantly) as *one* sensual relation (the dialectics of objective form and content found in

[5] See J.N. Findlay's 'Foreword' to The Phenomenology of Spirit. p. xxix (1977 edition).

Hegel). Before this event there is prehension but not yet consciousness. My dictum is—*consciousness is a form of prehension but prehension is not a form of consciousness*. In other words, Hegel is right in formulating consciousness as a special form of reflexivity, with prehension being loosely associated with Hegel's theory of under-developed Spirit; as still a basic form of non-sentient "realisation". Consciousness encourages *one form of relation* (subject-object or subject-world) such as Kant's unity of apperception, whilst prehension affords a multiplicity of encounters not reducible to a transcendental translation of one space or time or one model of the sensual.

In other words, instead of portraying Hegel's absolute idealism as the affirmation that everything *that is* intrinsically possesses conceptual content commensurate with human thought, or that all matter has some conceptual or ideal property or nature, we should alternatively see Hegel as asking a retrospective and irreversible question; if there has been this long history of the unfolding of Spirit as the development of logical syllogisms moving through "many states of things that are inert, external, purposeless, mechanical, contingent, irregular, empirical and brutally real",[6] and if the logical impulse has eventually prospered in that field (of nature) and culminates in the production of human beings and hence human consciousness, then does our reflection of that prior nature contain within it the new, developed expressions of those syllogisms, and, if so, can we really discredit this new "grasping" of logically refined content as merely a human-centred epistemology or should we try and reveal the interconnectedness of these categories (and their further logical conditions) as a science of concepts; as a truly ontological enterprise that encompasses these refined concepts within a more expansive definition of reality which reality itself accounts for (absolute idealism)?

It is my opinion that we should lean less towards the human-oriented notion that the disclosure of objects within this new logical schema (the universal synthesis of categories such as quality, property, particularity, universality, singularity, etc.) provides us with the definitive account of the objects' content, and instead remain within an ongoing dialectic (or tension) between the *implicit* identity of objects (and object–object

[6]. J.N. Findlay. *Hegel's Use of Teleology* in *Ascent to the Absolute*. 2019 edition. p. 132. Routledge.

interactions) and the *explicit* extraction or disclosure of their content through human synthesis, reflection, grasping, phenomenology. This method safeguards Hegel's initially realist claim in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* whereby objects remain as "truth" or "essence" "regardless of whether it is known or not" (i.e. the *implicit* self-determination of objects) whilst allowing the development of *explicit* human 'Notions' to play a more supplementary and revisionary role in matters of epistemology and ontology (as well as in historical, political, social and cultural matters). It is in fact this constant *revisionary* attitude—between implicit and explicit determinations of the object—which is more along the lines of a Marxist-Hegelian *dialectical* attitude towards the perpetual iterations of the historical and political.

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My book *Object-Oriented Dialectics* was essentially a pre-critical look at the possibility of complex dialectical operations *prior to* the advent of human thought and the subsequent emergence of what Hegel called determinate 'Notions'. The book speculated upon the possibility of the 'being through the other' of various natural and non-natural objects just as Hegel's meta-social account of human beings is identified through a developed notion of how the subject is externally seen through the Other and nurtured through socio-historical programmes. But this dialectical oscillation[7] is also indexed into the very nature of reality; that the essence of an object is *contradictory* in that its possible trajectory of understanding must emerge as (1) the assertion of its *immanent being* (as quasi-relative-subjective), (2) the *externalisation* of itself as object/form (as quasi-relative-objective) to (3) the subsequent reconciliation of internal and external through a mode of 'purpose', 'function' or 'utility' (Hegel's teleology).

Yet this also includes a much deeper, metaphysical awareness; the integration of an object's positive being with its *nothingness* or *non-being*; what was once purportedly the object's *self-identical* being becomes determined by its finitude and its non-being element, that is, its

[7] 'Being-for-another' and its eventual return to the mode of 'being-for-itself'.

non-self-identity ("the return to its ground" or the "movement into its opposite", i.e., non-X).[8] The previous threefold dialectical oscillation[9] of the object can be further interpreted as the intrinsic need for Spirit's objects (or matter) to be *identified through itself*; as an operation of self-synthesis which Hegel constructs as an operation of reflection; immanence must encounter its transcendence, particular must encounter its universal aspect, internal must encounter its self-externalisation. In brief, *opposites* are constructed in order to safeguard dialectical synthesis or mediation as the sublation, absolutisation and realisation of both terms as *absolute identity*. Spirit's movement of preservation, of bringing the past to bear on present and possible future scenarios, and of organising itself in relation to a dialectic of quasi-part and quasi-whole, is not a *conscious operation* (panpsychism) but a logically unfolding, necessary operation.

Let us look at how Hegel derives this mediation of opposites outside of purely subjective forms of synthesis: (1) –There is a kind of vitalism within what Hegel terms *Spirit;* that objects are determined to reach a form of realisation (or ideal reality) *through the immediate adjusting context which receives, responds and re-organises objects accordingly* ("into the whole or universality") which we can term teleology or perhaps less controversially a theory of homeostasis and even a form of self-organisation found in systems theory;[10] (2) through the myriad 'prehensions' (Whitehead/Harman) of objects encountering other objects (which could be further 'universalised' into a general theory termed 'translation' and even 'polypsychism');[11] (3) through Spirit's prenatal form of consciousness in nature; the ontological belief that reality expresses itself *logically* and that—sooner or later—this logic will necessarily become aware

[8] The object's relation to Being and Non-Being is one of "suspension" (Aufheben); it is part of the Becoming process that mediates Being and Non-Being. However, this is not some philosophy of finitude in the human or tragic sense; even when a body ages, dies, etc., its bones are still suspended by its Being and Non-Being elements; objects (and the Becoming of life) constantly expresses this tension from both sides; the *infinity* of finite actualisations of Being and Non-Being.

[9] See above bullet points 1–3 in previous paragraph.

[10] See autopoiesis in Luhmann's theory of autopoietic social systems.

[11] For me, the operation of prehension or of polypsychism is unconscious. It is simply an account of the operation of Spirit from the point of view of the particular and not the universal (i.e. particular objects).

of itself (the absolute Idea). This is described 'on the ground' as the logical self-expression of objects which culminate in the "moving shapes of human consciousness" *as* the self-realisation of the absolute Idea.

Regarding the relationship of *contradiction* with this co-constitution and reconciliation of opposites within the dialectic, as a heuristic I can think of at least four further ways in which Hegel's "essence as contradiction" can be relayed onto the ontological structure of *the object*: (1) the movement of self-othering which is extended to inanimate objects and made possible by Harman's object-oriented notion that all objects have an interior and exterior; a non-relational core element and a relational, implicated element, which co-constitutes the object deriving from the tensions between real and sensual. In other words, instead of the object's movement into the realm of mediation through its environment and other external objects (what Hegel terms "self-externality") as a form of "being through the other", Harman inverts this passage and describes the movement whereby the object is not viewed from the outside but rather is *re-established from the inside* as it *translates* externality and encounters externality *through the sensual* in its own singularly unique way. The contradiction might then be rearticulated as the continual re-establishment of the object (essence) through outside (external) entities[12] (2) from the traditional Kantian/Hegelian dispute between contradictory and non-contradictory entities (which Meillassoux revisits in his book *After Finitude*[13]); the non-contradictory account of Kantian noumena states that there must be something beyond appearances that does not contradict appearance. For example, a contradictory object/essence would be the notion that behind appearances are simply more appearances. Hegel doesn't necessarily want to say this, but he does refute the notion of the noumenal and subsequently formulates contradiction as a very real characteristic; that the object is not self-identical (and neither is appearance). In other words, the Hegelian claim would be that behind appearance cannot be a noumenal X because there is no valid concept of a self-identical X. Instead, X must be the mediation or movement that includes

[12] This is one interpretation of Harman's sentence: "The relation between an object and its own real qualities (we called this essence) is a relation produced by outside entities." Harman, Graham, *The Quadruple Object*. Zer0 Books, Illustrated edition. 2011, pp. 106–7.

[13] See Ch. 2 of *After Finitude: Metaphysics, Fideism, Speculation*, Bloomsbury, 2012 edition.

both what it is and what it is not; what we could call an immanent 'emptiness' or 'pure' Being, on the one hand, and also the determination that fills empty Being with content ("determinateness") whilst this new content presupposes a movement of 'self-othering' that exists somewhat outside of Being whilst being re-inscribed as a new element of Being.[14] This thesis is aided by Hegel's notion that all difference is internal difference[15] (presupposing a theory of the absolute which contains the two) and also his notion of infinity (infinity presupposes that difference is united and suspended (i.e. in the object)). This leads us to Hegel's association of contradiction with the object. (3) In this sense, the object appears as *the* site of contradiction; the expression of the inter-relatedness between the absolute (logical) categories of difference and the "selfsame", expressing itself as the perpetual movement of "the opposite of an opposite".[16] The object is therefore the *suspension* of otherness and the selfsame ("contradiction") represented in menial terms as the persistence of the unity of the object beyond the flux of becoming.[17] This notion of "contradiction as essence" is synonymous with the *finitude of an object* in relation to what seems at the time the eternal immanence (or metaphysics of presence) of an object. One could definitely describe the object as a suspension of sorts, but the object is not reconciled with its opposite primarily by 'presence' (suspension, the concrete, the actual), although the object of course takes on this effect. Rather, it is Hegel's understanding that the *movement that mediates* Being and Non-Being (Becoming) should be eternalised as *the infinite circle of finite objects* "returning to their ground" and *not* the static or self-identical object. In

[14] I assume that this 'gap'–between pure Being and particular determined (b)eing (which negates the former for its own existence) is what Lacan and later Zizek are interested in regarding Hegel's work.

[15] "For in the difference which is an inner difference, the opposite is not merely *one of two* - if it were, it would simply *be*, without being an opposite - but it is the opposite of an opposite, or the other is itself immediately present in it." (Hegel, G.W.F. Phenomenology of Spirit, pg 99. Oxford University Press, 1977)

[16] Ibid., p. 99.

[17] The seemingly simply "unity of difference" that Hegel finds in the object; that a form remains beyond its ephemeral environment that subtly changes it (the difference between accidental and intentional qualities) is something that Graham Harman is very interested in too; this distinction (or "tension") being elaborated upon in his theory of real and sensual objects and qualities. (see *The Quadruple Object*, Zer0 Books, 2011).

other words, it is the very ontological-dialectical process that the object suspends that we must try and grasp and not the objects themselves (as an object 'itself' cannot be extracted from this process). In other words, this point (point 3) suggests that objects express the more abstract, ontological definition of contradiction found in point 2 qua what Hegel calls the *particularity*, *singularity* and *universality* of the object. This leads us to point (4) where the perpetual emergence and return to nothingness of all objects represents an absolute process whereby the two are united and include oneself; this contradiction leading to absolute *knowledge*. This last contradiction is similar to the trajectory of the infinite circles of finitude (becoming) in objects but instead of making the antithesis death or nothingness (its perfect negative or non), as a kind of vertical line going down (returning to ground), we have a horizontal line that captures both the existence and non-existence of the object as if two parts of the 'becoming-object' (just as Hegel believed that being and non-being co-exist in becoming as a determination; as "suspension"). Rather than vertical, this speculative awareness expands the knowledge (or wisdom) of the object out horizontally. It is already both itself and its other; the object's existence was just a mediation of the eternal (a moving image of the eternal as Plato used to say) and this contradiction can resolve the being and non-being of the object into an absolute identity. Hegel's association of contradiction with absolute knowledge can be discerned in both an idealist and revisionist way. The revisionist way is expressed in the notion that a "unity of differences" can be reconciled due to the idea that when a limit is imposed—on thought, or concretely as an object—the identification of this limit itself negates the limit and produces a supplementary identity that integrates/sublates the prior antagonism. This negational account of both thought and identity (revisionism) is also—I believe—shot through into Hegel's theory of the dialectical unfolding of time (and space); a particular moment in time negates the limit of its 'condition of possibility' (i.e. its absolute ground) as a precondition for its passing. A particular location of space could seem to negate absolute space by taking itself up into that space, by being a fugitive in that space; a concrete (actual and hence relative to other actual points) location untethered to the absolute (virtual) space that conditions it. In this sense, it echoes Levinas' provocation: "[W]ho is it that I have sacrificed by being here? Who's space have I taken away?". The second, more idealist way that

contradiction is associated with absolute knowledge can be found in the seemingly simple idea that—regardless of the endless forms of historical, social, cultural and political alienation—and regardless of the endless process of negotiating a thesis, antithesis and synthesis through the dialectic—the identification and absolutisation of all terms have already been accomplished; difference/opposition/otherness, sameness/identity, particularity, singularity and universality, even the categories of being and non-being have been formulated to account for the absolute scope of all possible determinations in reality. The French Revolution may actualise these logical categories differently to say the emergence of Egyptian religion or Capitalism (they may even transform these categories whilst remaining fundamentally tied to them) but they are 'all-in-all' absolutely prefigured or absolute moments or aspects of a whole. In other words, there may be different *characterisations* of 'difference', 'individuality', 'universality' etc. but their 'notions' remain the same (absolutely).

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One of the many conclusions of this research was that for any entity to exist—as actual—it must have an accompanying interior and exterior. This is an absolute claim about reality and I don't think it is miles away from Graham Harman or Timothy Morton's object-oriented notion of there being nothing but objects (before you ask, yes, I'm talking about air, water, specks of dust or 'outer' space—in fact, 'outer space' shows us that tellurian/earthly space is a *specific* space itself propagated with specific properties/objects: it is not arbitrary space!). Another conclusion is that the relation between internal and external must be dialectically produced and that this does not mean reducible to either (as I have previously stated; it is because internal cannot be reduced to external and vice versa that objects exist in the first place). This is similar to Harman's claim that an "object's essence is produced by outside entities" but not *subsequently reducible to* outside entities because a movement of the relational into the non-relational occurs; 'real qualities' emerge out of a "complex gap" between a non-relational element of interiority and a relational element of externality. This complex movement (or infiltration) of the relational into the non-relational ("allure") already insinuates that 'essence' is not hereby guided by the Platonic description of unchanging forms. We

could also add that *sensual objects* possess *real qualities* in that we can relay specific sensual objects to other people who may translate them differently (hence showing the existence of a specific, original sensual object that has particular qualities of its own that cannot be reducible to other people's sensual interpretations).[18]

This gets more complex because a relational element of externality (the chemical and mechanical relation in Hegel or an accidental quality in Harman) will also be associated with some external *object* or other, and this external object will also have an accompanying non-relational element within/inside it. This is the ontologisation of the 'tension' between relationality and non-relationality that both Harman and Hegel affirm as co-existing. Harman has stated that space is both relation and non-relation; has withdrawn and relational aspects,[19] and Hegel of course is famous for introducing 'non-being' (and 'nothingness') into being as a co-existent (dialectical) element he names becoming.

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What *Object-Oriented Dialectics* misses out though is just exactly what happens when human consciousness comes onto the scene; how Hegel affirms the reality of the object (not dependent on thought) and reconciles this *to* thought; the dialectic of thought/non-thought being capable of integration into Hegel's inventory of dialectics as something which *can be thought*, absolutely. One of the main reasons for writing a book on *Hegel and Speculative Realism*[20] is because I am adamantly against any notion that there is a *co-constitution* of object with thought in Hegelian phenomenology, but rather that human thought and the structure of the object appear as two different instantiations of the same underlying logical structure of reality; not co-constituted as in the Husserlian noesis and noema but two relatively autonomous objects (replacing subject and

[18] I'm very much interested in how dreams disclose this notion of real qualities within the sensual; my dream is not some arbitrary collage of purely sensual information: it has a unity, it has nuances and details that cannot be reinstated back into the sensual (whether relayed back to myself or relayed to an eager audience).

[19] Graham Harman, "The Road to Objects", continent 3, No. 1 (2011), 171–179.

[20] Johns, Charles, *Hegel and Speculative Realism*, Palgrave 2023.

object with object and object) that cannot be conflated or reduced to one-another, simply because no two objects can achieve this total fusion into each other (or total synthesis of one another). What is unique and significant in Hegel's ontology is the idea that the link between subjects and objects is *genealogical*; humans emerge from out of a lineage of object–object relations that express logic in a specific way, a logic that we can partly understand but partly must also speculate upon, but because we have come from out of that logical activity we have some way or route to thinking the activity of logic prior to consciousness without sublating the entire field of pre-human logical activity into some explicit, present-at-hand epistemological system.

Hegel's mistake is to interpret human consciousness emerging from nature as something which can then sublate its prior conditions (i.e. as if the synthesis of a thesis and antithesis could successfully include within itself all the content of such a thesis and antithesis). This is not what in fact happens in Hegelian dialectics. Instead, the prevailing synthesis simply *negotiates* the thesis and antithesis, takes only the apex of the antagonism and then re-works this antagonism into an alternative that only contains the two prior forms through a *caricatured* reading of them (just as the colour green does not adequately express the qualities and intensities of the yellow and blue that are combined to make it).

This result in Hegel is in the notion that human knowledge can *think* the difference between subject and object and can produce an algorithm of conceptual and non-conceptual, identity and difference, *which is itself identified in that thought*. In other words, the subject does not co-constitute the object but it can conceptually enrol the object in a series of contradictions or antinomies that *appear as absolute knowledge* to the human. In fact, there should be a unilateral sentiment seen in Hegelian phenomenology; that objects do not depend on thought to exist but thought depends on objects to exist, and knowledge depends on objects to exist, and more importantly, objects pre-exist human existence. There's a whole book written on what nature is doing before human beings by Hegel, he is just extra sensitive that—to talk about such nature as human beings ('for us')—some kind of ontological conversion has had to take place; the conversion of the immediacy of nature (empirical traits) into determined notions.

Graham Harman seems to be the only philosopher who attempts to problematise Hegel's account of conscious sublation (Hegel's account being shared with the majority of the history of Western Philosophy). For instance, the idea that object–object interactions can be reduced to either (1) some objective 'view from nowhere', which places all object–object encounters within the physical (pseudo-objective) realm of cause and effect, and absolute theories of space and time. (2) object–object relations can be reduced to 'logical' connexions found in the mind; Hume famously uses the terms contiguity, resemblance and cause and effect, and Kant, the reduction of interaction to the phenomenal realm. (3) the reduction of object–object interactions into an *external* logical-mathematical framework such as Descartes 'extended substance' or a one-dimensional reading of Hegel's objective natural and logical categories, that is, mechanical, chemical and teleological processes, and his theory of logical determinations (the syllogism). Instead, Harman produces a philosophy of the real and the sensual (real and sensual object and quality) which gives us no access to the 'real' interaction of objects and discredits any arbitrary formulation of object interactions (materialism), opting instead for the nuanced operation of 'translation'. This notion (of translation) allows us to broaden our concept of relation. For example, we cannot fully claim that the relation between two cars crashing, or the relation of a raindrop upon a windscreen of a car, is the same relation. For two reasons; (1) one must bear in mind how the objects themselves bring themselves to bear on the relation (or the other object it encounters) and (2) which amounts to the same thing; one relation shared between two objects can be pluralised into a multiplicity of different interpretations of that 'one' relation; the raindrop on the windscreen is different to the dust within the raindrop that afforded it to fall, or the type of glass (and curve) of the windshield, and how it affects the object as a whole (car), and what conditions this encounter takes place in (in darkness?). In fact, using Harman's example of fire burning cotton, not only do objects translate a relation or object uniquely, the objects themselves may express some restraint or 'withdrawal' to the encounter (the blue of the flame does not come into contact with the white of the cotton, nor does the flame come into

contact with the scent of the burning cotton etc.). This already insinuates that our self-phenomenal model of (or access to) causation is neither transparent nor totalisable and also places a much needed re-emphasis on what the object 'human' adds to any encounter. One of the aims of my book *Object-Oriented Dialectics* was to try and describe this moment in 'substance' or 'nature' or the 'object' that appears at first free from any master-relation (such as human consciousness) and hosts a plethora of withdrawn, elusive and even perhaps magical causal networks and translations prior to both the undermining of such into logical determinations/categories and the overmining of such into phenomenal "shapes of consciousness".

* * *

This idea of absolute sublation is a unique one in the history of philosophy. In Hegel, the question of the absolute is not merely directed towards the *physical* (i.e. the entirety of all that exists) but the absolute universality of *applicable categories*. For example, if a calculator can produce any number in any variation in an infinite amount of ways and up towards an infinite number of additions (or subtractions), then we might wish to say that the calculator has the capacity for *absolutely* any number; it is not relative nor dependent upon a certain number and can 'grasp, 'translate', 'disclose' or 'convert'[21] the absolute scope and possibility of reality into its language of number.[22] Of course, the conditions of possibility for the calculators existence pertains to physical (and possibly historical, political, cultural, social) conditions, but there is no reason—in this example—to refute the idea that an absolute can *emerge* or is produced through conditions that are only later seen as concomitant with it (the calculator may be able to absolutise the universe into numerical dimensions or properties for example, whilst the original conditions for the calculator may only pertain to a specific part of that universe (i.e. a part where

[21] Depending on how you wish to view this process.

[22] Measurement, quantity, duration for example.

specific spatio-temporal-gravitational conditions emerge for the possibility and actualisation of specific materials to make a calculator)).[23]

I feel that this is one way of reading Hegel; that within thought one can not only catalogue quite easily the properties and relations of object–object and subject–object relations, but one can be much more abstract (or philosophical) and argue that one can think identity and difference—their connection and non-connection—and their distinction within thought itself. There is nothing stopping someone believing that they can also think being and non-being, as well as their connection (becoming) and their distinction (in fact, this is what Meillassoux claims when he states that he can think death without himself becoming dead in the process). In this more ontological sense—of thinking general (or universal) categories—one could argue that thought is absolute because anything that has existed, exists, or will exist, must take on some form of identity or some difference, some form of being or non-being, and hence thought can already posit all these things and their differential or non-differential connection or disconnections.

However, of course, most of us see this as a 'language game' that conflates abstract conceptual categories with real, concrete, particular and

[23] I guess the Hegelian question here would be; if you destroy the calculator, if you destroy the relative physical conditions for the calculator to exist, then does this absolute translation (operation) of number still exist in some kind of logical form? He would appear to say yes, not only because he absolutises space and time as logical (the entire universe or multiverse is dialectical) but also—more importantly—because he seems to allow the emergence of something (e.g. the emergence of human consciousness) to sublate what came before it; this new science of consciousness somehow retrospectively converts all that came before it into conceptual categories. This retroactive approach is fascinating to me and this for me is the crux of the *absolute-relative* method of Hegel. I think the strength of Hegel's logic is that it fundamentally is the expression of a specific physical, spatio-temporal reality (found initially in Nature) but that its logic of identity is absolute (like the calculator). This inevitably must have something to with 'correlationism' and speculative realism but one that has its cake and eats it; yes we are correlated to our own earth and its times and spaces (and its chemical, physical, biological make-up), but the knowledge produced is somehow absolute like the calculator yet we can speculate upon other spaces and times outside of our own and perhaps other absolute knowledges! As I imply in my essay *Iterations of the Absolute* (Palgrave, 2023), I describe Graham Harman's OOO as utilising the relative-absolute approach; "Objects must be conceived as autonomous individuals not entirely disconnected from their components, or from the other things against which they bitterly or happily strike. Yet it must also be seen that they are sealed off from one another" (Harman, Graham, *Aristotle With A Twist, Speculative Medievalisms*, Punctum, 2013. p. 238). Hence, we have *relative* contingency (object–object interactions) yet an *absolute* operation of translation (conversion into the sensual). Sensual translation is not relative to a specific set of objects. It is absolutely applicable.

indeterminate/contingent reality, as well as a temporal conflation; everything that has been and will come to be *we must know* (or at least be commensurate with) as we are the product of such a (dialectical) process, and whatever is to come must be limited to the trajectory of this particular reality—as the continual 'unfolding of the Idea'. Hegel says the same thing; that whatever path the absolute must take, it will always realise itself the same way.[24]

But when we think of a physical absolute; the entirety of what is, what exists, we find it implausible to suggest that our conceptual knowledge—although a logical knowledge—can map onto every supernova, dying star and black hole (let alone every possible multiverse, which are speculated to possess "causally unconnected"[25] characteristics with "different local laws of physics"[26]). With this questioning we find that there are two other implicit absolutes in Hegel's system; that time and space must be absolute because our spatio-temporal thinking (of inner and outer intuition as Kant used to say) must be able to comply with *all* of time and space to be absolute; (2) that the entirety of the universe is logical because we are logical creatures and think logically (at least in the modal sense of dialectical logic). This is in fact the same point that Hegel uses to argue that we can logically know and penetrate the realm of nature because nature is itself logical (and ideational) found in the teleological structure of natural kinds for example, and we are products of nature hence continue the logical unfolding expression but to a 'higher' (sublatory) degree. This is where Hegel's predilections are exposed; he wants the logical *continuity*—dare I say the logical *necessity*—between nature and mind—to be a form of reflection and reconciliation applicable to universality (*all* times and spaces … and multiverses!) when in fact he is describing an *absolutely*

[24] "The path to be considered is the one actually taken in the past and terminating in the present. It is, however, for all that, a path involving necessary implications and developments which will be preserved in all paths taken in the future and in the terminus to which these lead. For, on Hegel's view, all dialectical thought-paths lead to the Absolute Idea and to the knowledge of it which is itself." (Findlay, J.N. Foreword, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. 1977. Oxford University Press, p. vii).

[25] Linde, Andrei. Cambridge University preprint, Nuffield Symposium, July 1982 or chrome-extension: https://www.scientificlib.com/en/Astronomy/Cosmology/ChaoticInflationTheory.html.

[26] Ellis, F.R, George. Does the Multiverse Really Exist? https://www.researchgate.net/publication/51557468_Does_the_Multiverse_Really_Exist.

*correlated operation between thinking and earth*. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Preface to *The Phenomenology* where he states;

> The inner necessity that knowledge should be Science lies in its very nature; and the adequate and sufficient explanation for this lies simply and solely in the systematic exposition of philosophy itself. The *external* necessity, however, so far as this is apprehended in a universal way, and apart from the accident of the personal element and the particular occasioning influences affecting the individual, is the same as the internal: *it lies in the form and shape in which the process of time presents the existence of its moments*. To show that the time process does raise philosophy to the level of scientific system would, therefore, be the only true justification of the attempts which aim at proving that philosophy must assume this character; because the temporal process would thus bring out and lay bare the necessity of it, nay, more, would at the same time be carrying out that very aim itself.[27]

So, this is in a sense where Kantian critical metaphysics *is revisited*, to ask the now speculative, un-critical (but necessary) question; what if there is an outside beyond the conditions of possibility to think Hegel's absolute? We know that outside Kant's absolute *a priori* account of analytic and synthetic truths there remains a noumenal realm that is either not knowable and not thought or not knowable but thought, yet whether this thought actually finds traction is up for debate other than in the undetermined element of freedom that is sometimes associated with the noumenal realm. Regarding Hegel we might wish to ask the same question yet differently; what if there is an outside to the logical space-time of the dialectic that he has extrapolated from *tellurian* time (earth) onto everything else? Or, even more controversially, what if there were different types of mediations between the abstract 'in-itself' categories of being and non-being that emerge as drastically different real, actual, concrete becomings between these two states? Yes, my formulation of this notion of multiple self-actualisations of the 'pure', 'empty', virtual' logical categories of being and non-being returns itself to an *ontology of the object* because the *singular* (singularity) production of the abstract tension between being and non-being emerges as *simultaneously its own conditions*

[27] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Preface. Oxford University Press, 1977. Preface. p. 3.

*of possibility* (just as the 'big bang' emerges and expands from a singular point, *containing* its own conditions and laws within itself *as object*). This is what I call an *absolute-correlational object*; when the conditions of possibility cannot be found (or reduced) to any notion of environment, context or external condition/determination.

Before I try to explicate this in more detail and defend the need to ask such questions, let us look at another Hegelian trick that seemingly absolutises everything qua thought. It is similar to the historical account of Being in Hegel; that we are a product—and hence an extension—of logical dialectical activity found in nature. It is not simply that—because we are built up from the same fundamental activity of world spirit—this permits us to intimately know this nature (some evolutionary biologists make this gesture; that within us humans there exists the same prenatal spark of existence found in the earliest, most basic eukaryotic cells). Rather, it provides the *inverse* attitude (chronologically speaking); instead of valorising the human connection to our ostensibly essential or diachronic origins as an absolute connection and hence as a form of access to all of existence, we instead argue that we—now—as present-day humans—are the culmination of everything that has come before us and hence we are the result or totality of all such conceptual and non-conceptual processes. This is like looking at the number 250078 and stating that this number must intrinsically contain everything below this 'amount', as the accumulation of a certain 'quantity', rather than simply seeing six arbitrary numbers next to each other (or six numbers that may harbour unknown truths or qualities). Although there is still something to be said for how our brains are ancient organs that maintain traces of our ancestors and other animals, or that our behaviour is determined by years and years of different social-organisational practices, I cannot for a second believe that my capacity for knowledge and the forms it takes can grasp thousands of years of scientifically falsifiable, dialectically revisionary, speculative and simply unknown activity on earth, similar to how the number 250078 cannot grasp all of the numbers that it has accumulated through addition as an *aggregate*. For Hegel, the obscure reason why the

earth is "both subject and its product",[28] or why the earth is "the veritable prius, the subjectivity in which these differences are merely moments of an ideal nature and in which life first has its determinate being",[29] is because the earth is the location where absolute realisation is produced; it is the *source* of absolute logical extrapolation in a very literal sense. For Hegel, concepts don't simply organise or describe reality, they both disclose and emerge as necessary forms or "shapes of consciousness" identical with reality (or the real); as a constantly moving, transforming whole, and therefore the logical determinations created on earth are the most logically developed and intense area/object. It is the centre of everything that is, even if it is not the *physical* centre (it is the logical centre). Regarding Hegel's dialectic of developing categories, the notion of any *centre* is presumably where the most developed (and hence determinate) categories are produced, and that would be earth. It is not necessarily a *physical* centre but it is the *originary* (centre) of self-realisation, which may not have even expanded towards those dark and cold areas of the universe which can perhaps be 'grasped' as possessing logical categories (of quantity and quality for example) but have not as of yet understood themselves to be objects within a logical system of unity with their own contradictions that must be reconciled. Or perhaps the earth as centre can be articulated as the centre of *explicit knowledge*; that if the earth were to suddenly disappear or be terminated, the operation of identifying things (an operation that Hegel thinks is only possible with the full emergence of self-consciousness or self-reflexivity in human consciousness) would disappear with it too, and only blind, immanent operations of matter would exist without any awareness of this matter or their shared existence within a reality or spatio-temporal context. However, as we have speculated upon, there may still be forms of *non-transcendental realisation* generated through forms of prehension or polypsychism

[28] Hegel. G.W.F. *Philosophy of Nature: Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Part II (Hegel's Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences). Organic Physics III section 260. Oxford University Press, 2004.

[29] The full passage is as follows: "The earth is a veritable prius, the subjectivity in which these differences are merely moments of an ideal nature and in which life first has its determinate being. The Sun is subservient to the planets, just as the Sun, Moon, comets, and stars in general, are merely aspects of the Earth." (Eng, 280; Petry, II, 31.) https://omnilogos.com/marx-critique-of-hegel-philosophy-of-nature.

articulated by Whitehead and Harman's less anthropocentric and less idealist metaphysics.

Finally, we must remember that Hegel uses two other tricks for his absolute system: (1) the instantiation of eternity and (2) the formulation that all exteriority (or the 'outside') must either be ensconced within the absolute (hence re-articulated as a form of interiority: *within* the absolute), or as something that is sublated by a form. For example, the flower sublates the sun and the oxygen around it as part of its ideal "End" or trajectory, just as "the Sun is subservient to the planets, just as the Sun, Moon, comets, and stars in general, are merely aspects of the Earth" as "moments of an ideal nature". There could appear some obscure cosmological argument here whereby every external determination is sublated into a necessity; every planet, star, etc. is necessary for the finely tuned equilibrium of the universe, the emergence of earth and its safeguarding (the perfect balance between expansion rate and energy density for example). Yet I would sway more towards the notion that Hegel's particular brand of dialectical logic—because it includes opposites, being and non-being, etc.—stakes a claim to the radical autonomy of this logical structure in the sense that if anything would not correspond to such categories it could not be said to exist. But the category of non-being (or non-existence) is also taken care of in Hegel (as a dialectic of being), hence absolutely nothing can be said to fall outside of this logic.

Regarding *time*, the instantiation of eternity (or the 'good' infinity of Hegel) achieves the same desired effect; within eternity, every moment in time is the *centre of time* because there is equal infinity that comes before and after any 'arbitrary' moment. Hence, whatever form of time, whatever gravitational warping of time (to whatever radical effect), such must still obey the horizonless register of eternity (this is not unrelated to Meillassoux's theory of absolute time/hyper-chaos, but whereas Meillassoux's hyper-chaos can radically alter and rearticulate time anew at every instant (re-writing the laws of temporality again and again), for Hegel, regardless of these 'contingencies', eternity is never destroyed. In this sense, any radical alterity of space and time that would seriously challenge Hegel's logical categories would still 'have one foot' in Hegel's logic because such moments or environments of alterity would still be within an eternity that Hegel has aptly prepared for in his logical ontology. In

fact, unless you wish to uphold the opinion that there can be vastly different and autonomous objects that contain their own self-correlative conditions of time and space, Hegel's theories of difference and sameness—as being an *internal* difference concerning one another—and his formulation of being and non-being as contained in one encompassing movement, fundamentally rests on a notion of eternity that complements his logic.

* * *

Let us finish with this speculative realist twist on Hegel, as a philosopher of the *absolute earth*; a tellurian logic of space and time and its subsequent expressions in nature and eventually human thought (the phenomenal). An onto-logic that hits the mark regarding the intrinsic continuity between the object earth, its particular mass and gravitational pull, the specific warping of space-time that the earth subsequently produces, and the various forms of substance and consciousness that arises within this lineage.[30] However, like Kant's transcendental philosophy, the absolute safeguarding and intertwining of earth's physical conditions with its almost quasi-epiphenomenal content, cannot account for a time and space that throws such tellurian conditions of possibility into disarray. In other words, one cannot account for anything outside of the sphere of the Hegelian-tellurian unless it is (re) translated as an object 'for us' or an alien time and space than must inevitably (arrogantly) be a moment concomitant with tellurian spatio-temporal "unfolding" (or thesis, antithesis, synthesis). We have already spoken about how the physical spatio-temporal conditions of earth are converted into a form of spatio-temporality that expresses (and is derived from) a logical structure in Hegel. For example, Hegel believes 'space' to be "a mere form, i.e. an abstraction, that of immediate externality".[31] This notion of space requires

[30] We should also add the now almost naive common-sense realist remark that Kantian inner and outer forms of intuition are not subjectively circumscribed but objectively instantiated in natural conditions; solar time, circadian rhythms, etc. Using Maurizio Ferraris' term, surely there is a "shared, afforded space" of nature and its axiological duration beyond the distinct subjective and conceptual formulations of time (and space) found in Kant et al.

[31] Hegel. G.W.F. *Philosophy of Nature*. Mathematics, Space 197/198.

that it is converted (or determined) into particular instances; "space, on account of its lack of differentiation, is only the possibility and not the positing of that which is negative". What does this mean? It means that space has no content until negated (activated), which converts the *absolute* (pure, empty possibility of space) into *relative* points in space that are somewhat continuous with one another. This could be an argument for the more temporal account of space as that which is 'virtual' and must be 'actualised' (Bergson/Deleuze). This is not dissimilar from Kant's notion that space must be regarded only as something subjective in representation; something "negated" through consciousness as a 'particular' space (even phenomenal space).

Another (radical) interpretation, that possibly I alone adopt, is related to Hegel's theory of *determination as the actual* (i.e. that any thing that exists must be a determination and possess qualities that are not identical with it). This theory presupposes that 'space' and 'time' come into existence as *tellurian* determinations when proximate to earth (the space and time of physical movement, chemical reaction, entropy in evolutionary biology) and not theoretical or ideal concepts. In other words, the existence of any space and time *on earth* must be existent in nature as actual processes (space and time cannot be hypostatised beyond their physical, chemical, biological conditions). Of course, we can speculatively hypostatise spaces and times *beyond* our own tellurian time, but this is always converted into the tellurian on earth once thought ('correlationism'). This does not deny that other spaces and times may have actual properties and qualities different to ours. I read this as Harmanian; every form of space and time—whether tellurian or not—must be a type of material (or sensual object) and cannot be a theoretical postulate or ideal 'intuition'.

Of course, for us 'naive' or speculative realists (and even scientists, astronomists and cosmologists), this site of negation cannot be determined solely by consciousness, the mind, or the understanding (the inner and outer intuitions of space and time as Kant used to say). The only alternative is to see time and space as constantly negating themselves; not only as the negativity that affords the passage of one moment to another, but also as the Hegelian formulation of a particular moment in time and a particular location of space which *negates* the absolute ground that it emerges from whilst immediately having to negotiate its existence (as

actual) to a *whole* that recognises it and re-articulates it. This is formulated in my book *Object-Oriented Dialectics* as a double movement; a moment of time must negate its absolute aspect (its virtual or eternal dimension) to become a very real and fleeting moment which passes, but in order for it to pass, it must pass through a moment *which is not itself* or else the whole of time would be terminated after this particular moment passes. Therefore, the fleeting moment passes through the condition which allows one moment to pass to the next; the virtual or eternal. In this sense, every moment is a negation of the virtual or eternal time that ensconces it. This theory complements Hegel's ontology of space-time as that which is "a moving shape of eternity" (Plato); that "beginnings" and "ends" are mere moments of eternity's self-determination, self-reflection or self-realisation.

Where we stray away from Hegel is not in his theory of negation as determination/continuity (my theory of the object as a "suspension" of being and non-being—or birth and death—rests on the idea of the co-existence of spatial and temporal negation (i.e. what is the object if not a perfect example of the twofold movement of change, ageing, degradation whilst *remaining* an object nevertheless exposed to such instants?)), rather, where I differ is in the refusal to think such processes of negation as universal in their logic. For example, why should the continuous, developing, dialectical logic of Hegel correspond to every environment in the entirety of the cosmos? If we are to take Andrei Linde's "causally unconnected mini-universes"[32] theory seriously, or George Ellis' hypothesis of different universes with "different local laws of physics"[33] compared to that of our own earth, then surely what Hegel calls "Science"; " the form and shape in which the process of time presents the existence of its moments"[34] must differ depending on the different "forms" and "shapes"

[32] Linde, Andrei. Cambridge University preprint, Nuffield Symposium, July 1982 or chrome-extension: https://www.scientificlib.com/en/Astronomy/Cosmology/ChaoticInflationTheory.html.

[33] Ellis, F.R., George. Does the Multiverse Really Exist?

[34] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Preface. Oxford University Press, 1977. Preface. p. 3.

that time takes (let alone the notion of completely different productions of time "out of joint with Hegel's formulation).[35]

Hegel simply formulates space and time through the dyadic model of *space* as absolute undifferentiation ("space is a total lack of differentiation, it is only the possibility and not the positing of that which is negative"[36]) and then a subsequent "negation" of this indifference qua *time*, which purportedly gives indifferent space its "self-externality" and various determinations. I applaud the co-existence of time and space as negation (as continuity) but why only one type of spatio-temporal negation (tellurian continuity), and why can't there be different *logics* of negation (like the possible logics of different universes or even worlds)? Hegel is keen to show how the logic of indifferent space, and its determinations qua time, is *sublated* by the logic of the object (earth). What does this mean? It means that indifferent, abstract spatio-temporality is utilised/sublated as a *teleological* aspect of the earth. Time and space become so intertwined with the activities of nature (the conditions for life, growth, the acquisition of nutrients (photosynthesis), the orientation of bodies, the time of experience or lived duration (duree), etc.) that time and space can no longer be seen as "peerless dimensions of the cosmos" but conditions of possibility and materials for the development of life (especially human life for Hegel) and the culmination of reason or "Spirit". Even the 'abstract' space and time of the earth become sublated (or translated) into very particular teleological processes with qualities; space on/in the earth is in fact full of nitrogen and oxygen (and some other gases) and is not immune/autonomous from the earth's weather conditions (e.g. as air warms up, the molecules start to vibrate and bump into each other, increasing the space around each molecule. Because each molecule uses more space for motion, the air expands and becomes less dense (lighter)).

[35] It is simply incorrect to suggest that all time is the same but measured differently. Time is produced or derived from the deeper tension between Hegel's dialectic of Being and Non-Being (i.e. it emerges as many, myriad products of such a tension). This production contains its own unique ingredients (such as the planets in our solar system) and even if we were to argue that the spatio-temporal conditions of 'outer space' is analogie (in degrees) to that of tellurian time and space, one can still argue (as does Hegel) that this time and space is *utilised* differently (a difference in kind possibly) regarding the sublation of time and space qua nature, life, bios, etc. On earth, time is intertwined with the condition of life, and this commensurate is nowhere else to be seen … yet.

[36] Hegel. G.W.F. *Philosophy of Nature*. Mathematics, Space 197/198.

But if we continue this 'logic', why can't we say that Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, etc. 'sublate' indifferent space and time into conditions for their own planet? We already know that a planet's particular mass will determine its levels of gravity, and that gravity will determine the planet's temporal character (where gravity is stronger, time passes more slowly). Why can't the materials of a planet express the specific time and space that structures that planet, just as Hegel believes that Spirit must "go on to exhibit the self-externalisation of purely logical categories in the sensuous shows of nature and in the contingencies which fill space and time"[37]? Is it that the specific brand of (tellurian) logic produced on earth has not had the time (nor effort) to show how a planet (like Mars) "self-determines" or "realises" itself through the process of "self-externality" and the subsequent inclusion of particulars into a whole, unifying system? If Spirit and the Absolute Idea ostensibly (and arrogantly) culminates in human reason/thought, then perhaps we must identify such a planet (like Mars) with our (Hegelian) logic of universal categories and synthesis in order to restore such purpose and conceptual content back into such a planet retrospectively. Or does Mars perhaps have its own quasi-logical way of expressing its products through a content commensurate with it (a relative-absolute correlation)?

* * *

Hegel's universalisation of dialectical logic is bolstered not only by his theory that all of space and time is intrinsically (and univocally) logical (without regard for *illogical* possibilities such as Meillassouxs "hyper-chaos" or fundamentally different forms of time and space which aspects of Einstein and multiversal theory acknowledges), but also through his universalisation of the categories of Being and Non-Being without taking into account how the emergence or activation of such categories may retroactively transform and redefine such categories in the first place. For example, our universe can easily be caught in the web of Hegel's system; the category of 'Being' can be applied to it, and anything non-self-identical to this Being of the universe (what Hegel describes as Being's

[37] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Foreword. Oxford university press, 1977. Preface. p. xxix.

"self-othering", which causes Being to be *mediated* through this 'other' as a form of *Becoming*) is also factored in. Hence, Hegel's original triad of logical categories (Being, Non-Being and Becoming) can theoretically account for anything that exists at any point in time (and through its very dialectical nature, anything that *does not exist*; as a category of 'non-existence' which Hegel thinks is "internally opposed"/connected to anything's existence dialectically). However, it is the Becoming/mediation/determination of the abstract categories 'Being' and 'Non-Being' that in fact *actualise* these categories in the first place (no-one can know or experience 'Being' 'in-itself' or 'Non-Being' 'in-itself' because they are always mediated by a 'Becoming' that actualises them as poles). Hence, different Becomings actualise different accounts of Being and Non-Being. This means that the actual 'Becoming' (concrete existence) of 'Being' can differ wildly from any presupposition of 'Being' or 'Non-Being'. If read in a certain way, we can interpret Hegel's entire metaphysical project as describing a *singularity*; a very specific, real mediation of the speculative categories 'Being' and 'Non-Being'.[38] He describes to us what this mediation is; the unfolding of a time and space which is subsequently found to be logical and furthermore found to encounter/realise itself as it becomes manifest in human consciousness *as* Spirit. This then begs the question; what other mediations of 'Being' and 'Non-Being' can be actualised? I remember reading Zizek somewhere saying that the actualisation of love (embodied in a specific individual for example) has the capacity to change the very notion of love and therefore can retroactively change what we hitherto defined as this act. Where this theory meets the object (and perhaps Object-Oriented Ontology) is in the idea that the actualisation of the two abstract categories 'Being' and 'Non-Being' creates a reality, or object, or hyper-object, that contains its own conditions through making 'Being' and 'Non-Being' *real*. To reiterate, before this moment of actualisation, 'Being' and 'Non-Being' cannot even be said to exist (*existence* belongs to the 'Becoming' of the two categories; their actualisation as a mediation, and cannot be applied to either term—other than heuristically—prior to this event).

[38] It doesn't take too much energy to speculate upon possible forms of Being which do not exist in our universe (the Being of things that are irreducible to the Becoming of our universe).

Can we use the example of the Big Bang to this effect? Something emerges which cannot account for its own existence *through any external register*. In fact, one could say that the very emergence of the big bang creates its own conditions of possibility, along with its own set of self-determined physical laws. In this sense, the Big Bang creates an actualised object which contains its own conditions of possibility and cannot account for a 'Being' or 'Non-Being' outside of it. In this sense, a possible 'Being' or 'Non-Being' only 'exists' in a hypothetical sense and not a real sense (it does not belong outside of the Big Bang or conditioning the Big Bang, etc.).

This autonomy continues even if we integrate the actualisation of a certain 'Being' and 'Non-Being' *within* an actual universe. For example, it is possible that "whenever a black hole forms in our universe the singularity that is created could become the Big Bang of another universe and again the compact manifold configuration could change and that would result in a universe with different laws of physics".[39] In other words, the actual physical laws of space and time could be "very different inside the singularities of black holes *even in our universe*".[40]

This links Hegel's early speculations on the specific (singular) activation of Being and Non-being through Becoming, to the inflationary cosmological theory of self-produced singularities (such as the Big Bang) and it also links to the question of *correlationism* and answers such under a different light; perhaps we are utterly and absolutely correlated to the very real Becoming (dialectic) which emerges from hypothetical 'Being' and 'Non-Being', yet perhaps I can—like Hegel and like some aspects of Meillassoux—speculate upon other 'Becomings' that we are not correlated to, with different laws of physics and hence different laws of representation and concept production, or posit an absolute "hyper chaos" which is guilty of producing such singularities: The *potentiality* between Being and Non-Being (its possible actualisations) is infinite and absolute itself.

* * *

[39] For example, read https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236493365_Anomalous_electron_pair_and_muon_pair_events_produced_in_electron_positron_annihilation.

[40] Ibid.

This may allow us to *have our cake and eat it* regarding being part of a tellurian *correlation* yet speculating upon other, alien correlations outside of our own. The tellurian correlation is apparent in everything earthly, from the air we breathe, the cells in our body, the local, physical laws of nature, to the grammar we use and the phenomenological forms we discern. All come from a particular spatio-temporal structure found in Nature; whether as an immanent self-determination (as in the Schellingian "super-subject' of Nature), or as a local (actual) determination of universal logic "self-externalised" *as* Nature (Hegel).[41]

But we can also—unlike Meillassoux—speculate upon drastically different logically and physically instantiated spatio-temporalities that unfold through their own activation of the infinitely inexhaustible categories of Being and Non-Being, as opposed to subsuming all possible times and spaces into one absolute time of hyper-chaos or radical contingency. What we require is a *pluralism* of radically different times and spaces *independent* from one another, lying 'side-by-side' in the occasionalist sense, and not a monism of hyper-chaos that *cannot discriminate between different moments or conditions from itself*.

I find this same monism of spatio-temporality—this same arbitrariness of contingency—in Graham Harman's formulation of 'space' as that which

> refutes both the Newtonian interpretation of space as an absolute container and the Leibnizian view that treats space as a system of relations. Instead, claiming that space involves 'both relation and non-relation'. On the one hand, space is "non-relational" to the extent that whatever object is "in" space is "withdrawn" from direct access and 'ensconced in its own private place'. On the other hand, space is also relational in that each object 'belongs to the same spatial arena' as another simultaneously… which … also implies that each 'is positioned at a determinate distance' relative to another, and is thus also related to it in some loose way.[42]

[41] Whereas Schelling's absolute 'super-subject' of Nature seems self-determining from the get-go, Hegelian ontology suggests that Nature is only one dimension of logic; Nature is the self-externalisation of logic in locatable, actual entities.

[42] See Young, Niki, All Objects are Bound by Time, 15 Years of Speculative Realism, Zer0 Books, 2023.

It seems here that we have *one* type of *universally applicable* space (the universalisation of relation and non-relation) and it is incumbent on *particular real and sensual objects* to reflect this irreducibility of space to either the relational or non-relational dimension of existence in their own unique, withdrawn and sensual ways. But we insist that space-time must be seen as a particular property or quality of the object itself (the Big Bang theory produces its own space-time as its material) and hence space and time are not universally applicable but local manifestations of the infinite Becomings between Being and Non-Being (to the extent that there are possibly non-spatial and non-temporal activations of Becoming that are not in accordance with the purported universal *applicability* of the hypostatised description of 'time' and 'space' that both Meillassoux and Harman accept). I am not suggesting here that Meillassoux cannot think of different temporalities (*After Finitude* spends much of its time arguing for the contrary), I am saying that time is still accepted as absolute and therefore universally applicable (in whatever form it may take).

What this teaches us is that the time and space we inhabit should not be hypostatised in any theoretical dimension outside of its actual (or practical) dimension. It is the *non-temporal* categories of Being and Non-Being which are activated to produce a Becoming that cannot be universally applicable but radically autonomous, including within it its own cycle of Being and Non-Being, its own finitude, its own beginnings and ends.

As Meillassoux rightly acknowledges, "we must uncover an absolute necessity that does not reinstate any form of absolutely necessary entity".[43] In other words, the neo-Hegelian speculation of other actualisations of Being and Non-Being cannot relapse into an argument for an absolutely necessary *entity* (the existence of other possible universes and dimensions concomitant with ours) which would naively conflate alternative Becomings into *our own* Becoming (as spatio-temporal existence) but rather must argue for the absolutely necessary *possibility* underpinning any one particular entity (or that an entity might not 'be' in alternative scenarios) which can never be identified through our own resources and hence *eludes the correlation* of tellurian space–time itself.

[43] Meillassoux, Quentin, *After Finitude: An Essay On the Necessity of Contingency*. Continuum (reprint 2009). p. 34.

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# 7

# Iterations of the Absolute: Hegel, Meillassoux and Object-Oriented Ontology

Fifteen years of speculative realism have come around rather quickly, and the Kantian metaphysical impasse, of whether we can know a reality outside of its inscription in human subjectivity (or a set of human norms[1]), seems to have lost much of its sting. Meillassoux proposes that we *can know* a real outside of thought; the absolute unreason driving any 'facticity' of a thing. Harman never suggested that the noumenal aspect of the object was far off in a distant galaxy, super-naturalised in some impossible realm, nor beyond the auspices of everyday reality; it was *right there*, as an object beyond (or irreducible to) its relations. The chair 'in-itself', the house 'in-itself', or the pine tree 'in-itself' is positively postulated before any dialectics of analysis (or 'negative theology'[2]) unfolds; the eidetic method, the Heideggerian crux of 'presence', or Harman's own ingenious

[1] In Robert Pippin's book Hegel's *Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*, he speaks of the Hegelian "Geist" as that which should be understood as the totality of norms according to which we can justify our beliefs and actions. The important point is that we cannot justify anything except in such a normative logical space of reasons. In other words, no kind of distinctively human rational cognition and action is articulable or intelligible independently of such norms.

[2] See Review of Graham Harman's The Third Table, Terrence Blake. https://www.academia.edu/1572436/REVIEW_OF_GRAHAM_HARMANS_THE_THIRD_TABLE.

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structure of real objects, sensual objects, real qualities and sensual qualities.

The 'in-itself's' of Meillassoux and Harman's respective philosophies are of a different species to each other however. Whilst Harman has been known to use the ostensibly antiquated term 'substance' and equates such to various non-relational *objects* or *unities*,[3] Meillassoux turns to a speculative *materialism*, mind-independent yet commensurate with mathematical formalisation. But it is their separate characterisations of the *absolute* that interests me. Whilst Harman refrains from using such a term (absolute) in his oeuvre, opting instead for a non-relational language of the object, the astute reader will quickly discern that to claim a non-relational aspect of the object is to claim a non-relative—and hence *absolute*—(independent) aspect of the object in some capacity.

Whilst Meillassoux strives to ground the sciences in an absolute 'speculative materialist' framework of 'hyper-chaos' which explicitly places the very consistency and traditional necessity of the laws of nature into (absolute) doubt and disarray, Harman allows for the independence from relation to be instantiated in various "middle-sized objects"[4] (amongst other, non-physical and imaginary objects). In other words, an object can be absolutely cut-off from another, and many of these such objects—that *appear* to be complicit in some form of interaction—produce new objects ('vicariously') that further compensate for the lack of any direct contact between entities.

> *Objects must be conceived as autonomous individuals not entirely disconnected from their components, or from the other things against which they bitterly or happily strike. Yet it must also be seen that they are sealed off from one another.*[5]

One must try and comprehend this seemingly paradoxical remark concerning the joint independence and interdependence of objects, and although Harman gives us a much more rich and complex answer

[3] An example of this can be found in Harman, Graham, *Aristotle With A Twist, Speculative Medievalisms*, Punctum, 2013, p. 228.

[4] See Harman, Graham. *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*. Pelican Books. 2018, p. 30.

[5] Harman, Graham, *Aristotle With A Twist, Speculative Medievalisms*, Punctum, 2013, p. 238.

(regarding unity and real and sensual tensions[6]), it is the principle concern of this paper to *speculate* upon the notion that objects contain capacities of independence (or 'withdrawal') in *degrees*, reflecting a force of *retraction* that culminates and is expressed in a much stronger and extravagant way through the philosophical notion of absolute containment (or the unconditional 'causa sui') of all that can be said to exist found in the earlier absolute metaphysical systems of Hegel and Schelling. This may be a kind of *physical* top-down model whereby the greater the object, the greater its capacity to "sublate", subsume or retain (e.g., the greater its gravitational, magnetic and electric force may be), or this may be a kind of *meta/multi-physical* form of retraction and containment involved in—for example—the absolute autonomy of multiverses described in Andre Linde's research on "causally unconnected mini-universes",[7] or whether—similar to both Hegel and Harman—the capacity of independence belongs 'on the ground' as a spectrum between 'dormant' objects (Harman) or merely 'external' objects (Hegel) and their varying capacities to exhibit *prehension* through the possible relations the object comes into contact with (Harman's polypsychism) or an object's *mediation of the whole* qua the many syntheses and 'developing' syllogisms/sublations of *World Spirit* (Hegel).

I interpret the 'correlation' that Meillassoux so criticises—and the *indirect* correlation of object–object interactions *qua the sensual* in Harman (the partial *correlation of translation*)—to be an *absolute* operation that in no way needs to be *universalised*. For sure, there is *nothing but* object–object interactions for Harman, but a collation of them would not amount to some kind of knowable totality. I think this is one of the key differences between Harman and Meillassoux; that knowing is synonymous with a kind of *reduction* for Harman, one that tries to negatively totalise the object, whilst Meillassoux secures a type of absolute (unground of) knowing as the totality of all that *is and may be*, that occurs

[6] As well as the introduction of a discourse on the distinctions and co-existence of relation and non-relation which I find equally as important and interesting. For example, see Harman's essay Harman, G. (2011) 'The Road to Objects', SubStance.

[7] Linde, Andrei. Cambridge University preprint, Nuffield Symposium, July 1982 or chrome-extension: https://www.scientificlib.com/en/Astronomy/Cosmology/ChaoticInflationTheory.html.

for no reason ('hyper-chaos'), which is still a form of totalisation (a thinkable totality[8]) even if it inverts the usual account of the absolute as a self-identical, 'sufficient' "foundation for knowledge".[9]

Regarding the idea of correlation as *absolute but not universal*, I see no insurmountable problem in suggesting that the object could be *a condition for its own reality* in the sense that—whatever external determinations it may come across—the fundamental requirement is that it (the object) must translate this determination *internally* in some way, commensurate with the object itself. In other words, whatever difference or alterity that an object may or may not come up against, it is left (sometimes futilely) up to the *object itself* to express such. And it would seem to me that this correlation (or translation) leaves enough room for wildly different versions of this operation, whereby various spatio-temporal conditions (or non-conditions) may expose how initially anthropocentric our own phenomenological account of translation may be; translation is absolute but in no way totalisable through *one* model of translation.[10] In a way, this account—of wildly different models of translation—is a rebuttal of at least *one* reading of panpsychism; if panpsychism affirms the notion that every fundamental constituent of the (physical) world is partly conscious, then this *universalises* the myriad and diverse kinds of interactions and objects in the world into one common *type* of relation, that is, the conscious ('sensual') relation. Yet the merit of Harman's object-oriented ontology lies in showing us that we have very little idea about how specific objects encounter one another; the 'conscious' relation prioritises the anthropocentric, philosophical account of something akin to Hume's principles of continuity, contiguity, resemblance and cause and effect, as well as Kant's *a priori* unification of the 'manifold' of experience. In other words, it places the site, value and explanation of any object–object encounter as something profoundly bestowed upon the

[8] Meillassoux has utilised the term 'intellectual intuition' regarding this notion in his book *After Finitude* (2012).

[9] Meillassoux, Quentin, *After Finitude*, 2012 ed, p. 64.

[10] In fact, this is one of my worries about the current interest in fusing OOO with panpsychism; that by claiming that every object in the cosmos has some sort of 'psyche' or *bit* of consciousness, we might in fact be corresponding/reducing the diverse ways in which objects encounter one another to a universally human-oriented mode of relation ("overmining"). This could in fact be seen as a specific form of Hegelianism (!).

human mind (as Harman rightly states, this is a different form of inverted occasionalism that tries to explain the interaction between independent objects/substances through perception alone). I worry that the inclusion of consciousness as a universal 'property' of all things (regardless to what degree) might be an attempt to subtly conflate the speculative realist (non-anthropocentric) account of foreign objects and relations into a system of *universal translation* (i.e. every object 'translates' the same way, or worse, that consciousness and translation become synonymous with each other or interchangeable terms).

It is odd that some might scoff at my initial proposition, that objects have a final say in the way they *undergo change* and how they *translate external into internal*, yet if we move upwards a few gears and sizes—to the human subject[11]—we find that Kant also described a *transcendental complicity* between any form of exteriority (or the noumenal, 'in-itself' of reality) and its conversion into a subjective (epistemological) space of corresponding concepts and phenomena. Let us go up a few more gears even and remind ourselves of how Schelling believed that the earth produced its own phenomena (internally, or as a contained 'super-subject'). Furthermore, Hegel believed that the earth produced its own specific, dialectically constituted logic of space-time, which absolutises difference and alterity into the earth's "moving shapes of consciousness". Take these two passages from Hegel for example:

> *The general system of individual bodies is the earth, which in the chemical process initially has its abstract individuality in particularisation, but as the totality it has an infinite relation to itself as a general, self-dividing process; - and is, immediately, the subject and its product.*[12]

And …

> *The planet is the veritable prius, the subjectivity in which these differences are merely moments of an ideal nature, and in which life first has its determinate*

[11] Traced at least back to the Early Modern philosophy of Rene Descartes.

[12] Hegel. G.W.F. *Philosophy of Nature: Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Part II (Hegel's Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences). Organic Physics III section 260. Oxford University Press, 2004.

*being. The Sun is subservient to the planets, just as the Sun, Moon, comets, and stars in general, are merely aspects of the Earth.*[13]

Although in someone like Hegel one does not have the chafing of the ideal with the real[14] (or the phenomenal with the noumenal) in his absolute objective idealism, offering instead a difference in *degree* between developing spirit and its preserved instances (or *implicit* content and *explicit* content), one is still dealing with a "super-subject" (or 'hyper-object') that creates its own 'conditions of possibility'. This is in-fact what Iain Hamilton Grant criticises in his response to Graham Harman in an essay entitled *Mining Conditions*[15] when he pejoratively states that the "origin of form problem" in the history of Western metaphysics "encounters the problem of genesis not extrinsically, but intrinsically", further arguing that this "same problem is echoed in Hegel"; that "anteriority becomes an ideal differentiation within an actual eternity".[16] Whether *exteriority* is sublated and "incorporated within substance",[17] whether *anteriority* is conflated qua the "eternally actualised" present (Hegel), or whether some unformulated space of *indeterminacy* is always already translated/converted as *necessary* (qua the quasi-teleology of *the whole*), what interests me in this position is where we draw the line regarding what Hegel called particular "self-fulfilling" forms (or Ideas). For instance, should one demarcate absolute 'self-subsistence' (Hegel) between the relative independence of individual objects (which still somehow participate in a "shared common space"[18]) or between the more encompassing 'self-fulfilling', self-organising principles of *earth* and the rest of the cosmos? And what about the varying differences between various planets (or

[13] (Eng, 280; Petry, II, 31.). https://omnilogos.com/marx-critique-of-hegel-philosophy-of-nature/.

[14] Whether this is regarding the real as 'withdrawn' in contrast to the sensual, or whether this is between the real as reflecting the ideal (as universal) such as Plato, Hegel bypasses both 'dualisms'. For example, the real (or 'truth') of the object will be found in its acknowledgement of its contradiction, and the 'universal' will already be found in the 'concrete' in some dialectical manner, while the 'universal' itself is not one of 'identity' but is anti-foundational and indeterminate (with respect to its actuality).

[15] Grant, Iain Hamilton, Mining Conditions, *The Speculative Turn*, R.E. Press, 2011.

[16] Ibid., p. 43.

[17] Ibid., p. 44.

[18] Harman, Graham. On Vicarious Causation. p. 190. Collapse 2. Urbanomic. 2007.

'hyper-objects') in the cosmos? And then, how are we to speak *objectively* about the possible *connections* between universes? This is what I term different *iterations of the absolute*.

> *Physics describes different kinds of multiverse. The easiest one to comprehend is called the cosmological multiverse. The idea here is that the universe expanded at a mind-boggling speed in the fraction of a second after the big bang. During this period of inflation, there were quantum fluctuations which caused separate bubble universes to pop into existence and themselves start inflating and blowing bubbles. Russian physicist Andrei Linde came up with this concept, which suggests an infinity of universes* ***no longer in any causal connection with one another*** *– so free to develop in different ways.*[19]

This is such an important question because it involves a novel form of speculative realism that accounts for *individual absolutes*, whether correlated or uncorrelated to thought, and this is where it distinguishes itself from what I believe to be older 'speculative realist' questions of the late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century German Idealists; a unique formulation/speculation of the absolute as universal, the reconciliation of infinity with unity and actuality, the investigation into the phenomenon as ideal, the spontaneity of the "I" with its reality, and the patching-up of the indeterminacy of nature with a unified, metaphysical and necessary/teleological system. All these remain speculative realist endeavours (the ideal and the real were not pitted against each other back then, as they have increasingly become today) but it seems to me that universality and totality (let alone the irreducibility of the *Subject*[20]) is abandoned in the new speculative enterprise, explicitly in all four of the original speculative realist members, for a variety of reasons. Several brief reasons might be that the de-absolutisation of what Meillassoux termed the 'correlate' (or correlationism) presupposes a temporality devoid of its *necessity* (contra Hegel), subsequently tumbling into the "bad infinity" of

[19] https://www.newscientist.com/question/are-there-multiple-universes/ (my bold).

[20] This is definitely the case for post-structuralist accounts of subjectivity (Deleuze, Foucault) but there could be an argument that there is a current trend of Lacanian scholars who recharacterise the subject as generating a kind of sovereign 'lack' or 'blind spot' in reality itself. In other words, there is a (S)ubject in the traditional sense, but it is irreconcilable with itself (Hegelian-Lacanian dialectical objectification).

Cantorian set-theoretical mathematics, a counter-Hegelian thesis which refuses the idea that the Subject is a necessary (and final) ingredient that constitutes the identity of the whole in reality, opting instead for the "blind-spot" and "not-all" of Lacanian–Zizekian ontology and the infinite regress and progress of objects in Harman's ontology. However, *necessity* does not have to be universalised in order to be absolutely "self-relating"; it seems abundantly clear that Hegel's formulation of necessity is not dogmatic but rather takes a retrospective or supplementary (depending on which way you look at it) account of how a specific ("concrete") set of circumstances will necessarily lead to—or be continuous with—a certain result (what Hegel calls the necessity of the logical unfolding of the dialectic). This supra-historical account applies just as much to a specific, individual object as it does to a more universally applicable capacity of necessity (the principle of sufficient reason for example). I believe that the *necessity of the object*, or the self-limit of the object, or the notion of the genesis of form as interior and not exterior to the object, or the absolutisation of the object as a *contradiction* (Hegel) that integrates both its existence and non-existence, is something that Harman takes up again and validates in contemporary philosophy. However, the question of the *plurality* of necessity/ies—as an autonomous self-relating reality (whether as object (Harman), human (Kant), earth (Schelling/Hegel) or the big bang (Lemaître))—is still something that the speculative realists are reluctant to deliberate. For example, in Harman there is an infinity of object–object interactions throughout the cosmos without any larger whole that might designate such objects as being absolutely confined to a specific object, zone, 'frame of reference'[21] or 'condition of possibility' that is absolutely different from another. In other words, do we wish to universalise the tensions between the 'real' and 'sensual' aspects of an object as *applicable to every context and every space-time 'fabric'* (Einstein)?[22] In Meillassoux there

[21] A relativistic reference frame includes (or implies) the coordinate time, which does not equate across different reference frames moving relatively to each other. The situation thus differs from Galilean relativity, in which all possible coordinate times are essentially equivalent.

[22] This question introduces us to more speculative questions; if 'translation' is universally necessary (if an object must convert external to internal—or the real into the sensual), then do we hypostatise this onto other universes with radically incomprehensible spatio-temporal, non-bio-logical, physical laws/domains or must we fundamentally reconsider what an object could be under such conditions and whether translation is confined to a certain spatio-temporal context?

is the existence of what he terms the "correlate" between thinking and being, yet it is de-absolutised by its contextualisation within an *absolute time of hyper-chaos*; a *blanket* absolute time which does not account for other objects which have the capacity to be autonomous from this hyper-chaos or have self-regulating rules absolutely distinct from this initial time. In other words, radical contingency is *universalised* yet such occurs as simply *one medium*; it does not confront other, different spaces and times because it is (or harbours) *all possible different spaces and times*.

Not only do I believe that *necessity* can take on a discrete character (autonomy), the concept of *universality* itself must adapt, from a method of disclosing or applying a shared, common feature equivalent to all particulars (as categories that particulars "participate" in, for example), to a kind of speculative *taxonomic* method which includes fundamental discontinuities and even non-shared features which betray any universal similarity, identity or correspondence. The word 'universality' is still stuck in the *universe* and therefore is only ostensibly universal to itself *as an object*. To attain true philosophical status we must think *multiversally* and this will necessarily confront a non-universality (absolute incompatibility) that must nevertheless—and somewhat paradoxically—contribute to the speculative[23] topology of all that there is.

In Harman's beautifully concise essay entitled 'Speculative Realism & Flat Ontology' he states that: "[T]he world or the universe does not exist. … There is no super-object that gathers all other objects together in a single, harmonious unity." He then adds that "this thesis is certainly endorsed by all OOO authors".[24]

In his paper *Time, Space, Essence, and Eidos: A New Theory of Causation*, Harman makes what I believe to be an analogous point; that "an aggregate is like a substance when viewed from the outside".[25] In other words, the definition of a totality/ies does not allow for itself to have external

[23] I use the word 'speculative' in the same vein as Meillassoux; to allow a thinking of possibility (contingency, event, entity, etc.) that is not re-integrated into some dogmatic 'metaphysical' system where 'everything that is' is converted into 'everything that is for us' or a necessity (principle of sufficient reason) that is not however necessary 'for us'.

[24] Harman, Graham. Speculative Realism & Flat Ontology. 2022.

[25] Harman, Graham. Time, Space, Essence, and Eidos: A New Theory of Causation. Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy, vol. 6, no. 1, 2010, p. 5.

qualities, yet "viewed from the outside", the so-called 'totality' is situated in another type of space, as a specific quality, therefore foregoing any sense of totality *as containment*. This antinomy seems inevitable for Harman and as we will see it is in-fact affirmed. And furthermore, the tiniest, most fundamental constituent of reality cannot itself be *totally* given because this *present-at-hand* description (for example, atomism) denies the essential notion that anything present must necessarily depend on a plethora of absent or withdrawn features of the object (let alone the idea that *the sensual* profile of the atom is always relative and perhaps *temporal*[26] regarding the object's 'givenness').

At the 2007 Goldsmiths conference on Speculative Realism, Harman states that he has "been speaking openly in the past few years in defence of the infinite regress and the infinite progress. … So, no, I don't actually have a totality of the world. There are just objects as far as you look. I never come to the end of them and say there's a largest object that contains them all, precisely for the reason you mention, because then you'd have a final, present-at-hand—in the Heideggerian sense—present-at-hand totality which was constituted totally of relations and which itself was nothing but relations. And I can't have that, for the same reason that I can't have a smallest particle, because then you'd have a tiniest present-at-hand atom that had no other qualities, because it would have no relational structure at all."[27]

In my humble opinion, the passage above argues implicitly for the immanent *co-constitutive nature of relation and non-relation*; we cannot have "nothing but relations", yet we cannot have an object "with no relational structure at all", hence a 'dialectical' formulation of the co-existence of the two ensues, similar to Hegel, which we will define in due time.

However, Harman states six years later[28] a change in this system:

[26] As Object-Oriented scholar Niki Young so concisely puts it; "(F)or Harman, what we call 'time' is forged through the tension between a sensual object and its respective sensual qualities existing within the "experience" of some object, whether human or otherwise". Young, Niki, All Objects Are Bound By Time, 2022.

[27] Harman, Graham. Collapse Vol 3, p. 400. Urbanomic. 2012 (reissued edition).

[28] I am simply going off the time elapsed between the 2007 Goldsmiths conference (and subsequently the 2007 Collapse journal transcribing the conference) and the 2013 publication of Aristotle With A Twist in Punctum's *Speculative Medievalisms* book.

> *(W)e find that individual things must be divisible into sub-components if they are to have distinct individuality at all, and this requires an infinite regress into the depths of things. But here again* ***the reverse does not hold****: there need not be an infinite progress upwards into larger and larger entities and finally into some "world as a whole", since there is nothing forcing substances to enter into combination with other substances.*[29]

I infer from this passage that "individual things must be divisible into sub-components" because, if they are not, what makes the general, unified object itself *divisible from its environment*? If we are to hold the autonomy/independence of the object as both plausible and ontological, then we must find this 'distinction' *shot-through* reality and the universe and not some kind of bias towards 'natural kinds' of objects, natural essences or "the world as a whole", etc. The opposite notion, that "there need not be an infinite progress upwards into larger and larger entities" is also an attempt to safeguard the autonomy/independence of objects, because if objects can be subsumed into larger and larger objects (or 'wholes') then what is an everyday object, ontologically speaking, if it remains a subordinate 'piece' to this 'whole', and why can't its non-relational component resist this relational subsumption? These are real, philosophical problems that Harman attempts to tackle in his ontology.

Concerning the last sentence of Harman's aforementioned cited passage, is the question really one of "force"? If the component/part is complementary to the aggregate/whole, that is, both can exist simultaneously as units/objects in their own irreducible/subterranean way, then why can't the earth be such an exemplary object; an aggregate that contains other objects just as equally independent; just as mathematical members of a set in set-theory can be *included* (as individual members) whilst the set itself is not included nor *contains* those 'members'? The problem for Harman should not be "the world as a whole"' or *earth* here (one unique object amongst an infinity of others in the cosmos), the problem appears to be the notion of some final whole or layer, which not only contains the conditions of possibility for *its* reality (as an object of self-relating negativity as Hegel used to say) but contains the conditions of possibility for

[29] Harman, Graham, Aristotle With A Twist, *Speculative Medievalisms*, Punctum, 2013, p. 252. My bold.

*all reality* (i.e. universality and totality). In other words, there must always be another object that can be translated as *dialectically* not itself (outside or *other* to it) in Harman's philosophy, yet still *commensurate with a universal system of presumably infinite objects*. Note that alternative theories could be possible; the idea that objects can still be totalities even if there are plural objects/totalities (never directly contacting one another), or that a universal, univocal, objective system of objects may in fact be the ingredients of one local aspect, realm or microcosm of reality which only appears universal *relatively speaking*; there may be other universes/multiverses/realities and dimensions with conditions incapable of producing what Harman conventionally calls 'objects' (generally speaking), which radically re-define the terms of 'translation' applicable to our *tellurian* or *galactic* models of time, space, essence and eidos.

Objects can endure as both a "thing that has a unified reality that is not exhausted by any relation to it",[30] and as an "emergent entity" that has "qualities not possessed by its parts",[31] and this could still be an extremely large object such as *the earth*, the earth that Hegel describes as a "totality"[32] which "preserves the differences as they exist within itself - their nature, on account of the *substance* to which they belong".[33]

Object-oriented thinker Niki Young has recently argued that Harman is a monist in the sense that Being is spoken about in one way: objects",[34] and Ray Brassier has suggested that Harman's philosophy is an "objective univocity … an ontology of pure objectivity",[35] hence, is the contemporary philosophical dismissal of both 'the whole' and objective totality really long behind us? The question of what was believed to be a Hegelian monism (rational monism) and an Aristotelian–Harmanian pluralism of substances is not so clear now. For example, one could argue that Deleuze has a monism of difference (univocity) which conflates—at least

[30] Harman, Graham, Collapse Vol. 3, Urbanomic, 2012 edition, p. 377.

[31] Harman, Graham. Aristotle With A Twist, Punctum 2013, p. 250.

[32] See Hegel's Philosophy of Nature III Organic Physics A. Geological Nature - B. Vegetable Nature - C. The Animal Organism.

[33] Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford University Press. 1977, p. 178. My italics.

[34] Young, Niki. The Abyssal Rift In The Cosmos 12:20 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDHNpC3eyEw.

[35] Brassier, Ray. Collapse Vol III. Urbanomic p. 316. 2012 edition.

heuristically—this distinction between both monism and pluralism.[36] What we find in Hegel is not some abstract, passive account of the affirmation of one *self-identical* substance, but rather a processual account of substance which is singularising itself, defining itself through some impossible relation to what *it is not*, its "movement into its opposite" (Hegel) as a form of *determination*. The whole is hence not some fixed *ground* constituting the general conditions of possibility for contingency. Conversely, contingency is expressed as a formal, sufficient and necessary process at the same time as it manifests itself through Being (they are simultaneously/dialectically produced). This is what allows the emergence of a new undetermined element (the indeterminacy found in both abstract Being and Nothing[37]) to be necessary,[38] a thoroughly new 'event' in the present and independent in its radical novelty, yet revealed to be coherent when integrated into the whole of its trajectory. Hegel's metaphysics contains many of the ingredients found later in Badiou's infinite multiplicity yet without the Hegelian caveat of the univocity (one voice) of *the whole* that Hegel espouses.

Regarding the somewhat *animistic* relation between reality's absolute unfolding and the *emergence of thought*, the uniqueness of Hegel's absolute *self-consciousness or Spirit*[39] is that it itself *becomes actualised through our account of it* and in this sense one cannot formulate Hegel's absolute as one that definitively contains all of its parts as some 'present-at-hand' entity existing there all along. It is instead a process- philosophy in this sense, but not one simply determining the arrangements of matter and the capacity for life, but of the evolution of the very *criteria* which reality identifies itself as (as conceptual self-reflection or 'Idea').

On a 'deeper' level regarding Hegel's metaphysics of *Becoming,* change comes from a *disturbance* in a web of relations. Hegel's account of

[36] Is it that there is *one difference* or many *different differences*? Is difference to be defined as one monistic capacity or as a quality or property irreducible to any other difference (pluralism)?

[37] Hegel equates indeterminacy with the non-determinate; the empty concept of Being without determination and hence quality. Non-Being (or Nothing) can be equated to a form of indeterminacy, as something Other to Being (alterity) yet dialectically complicit in the movement between itself (Non-Being) and Being, that is, a mediation which Hegel calls Becoming.

[38] See Bart Zantvoort's essay on Hegel and Meillassoux in this volume.

[39] Not to be misconstrued with Hegel's initial account of substance (Nature for example).

*Non-Being*—as dialectically infiltrated inside Being (as Becoming)—requires that a set of existing ("concrete") relations modify itself in response to the very *termination of relation* anticipated in the Non-Being aspect of Becoming (an Hegelian solution to Harman's subsequent metaphysics of non-relation). A termination that gives a kind of circular form or necessity to Hegel's absolute itself. In Hegelian lingo; if pure Being is immediate and without determination, it is a form of nothingness, but one that is only indistinct because it is pure—even excessive—*possibility*. Non-Being, on the other hand, is the *void* that determination takes (moves into) as it makes actual indistinct Being into something particular without knowing the result in advance (determination/mediation). If *Becoming* marries these terms, at first it would appear *complementary*; the determination of Becoming involves both opposites of Being and Non-Being and therefore can become *reconcilable* through *concrete* (actual) determinations, etc. However, notice that neither Being nor Non-Being can ever be fully actualised (as they are voided or excessive nothings). Hence, the two poles are also encountered as a *limitation*; not simply the limitation of finitude qua Becoming, but also the inexistence of *pure* Non-Being (Nothingness) and *pure* Being: their *irreducibility to* Becoming. This would suggest that things, processes or events appear as *nothing through something*. *Pure* Nothing or Non-Being takes the form of termination or disappearance as it becomes simultaneously implicated in the very determination that gives it partial existence (Becoming).

I will cite two examples of this strange irreducible passage between Being and Non-Being by Hegel below. The first, a more existential account of this Being—Non-Being determination. The second, a more formal metaphysical account:

> *A thing, a subject, a concept, is then precisely this negative unity ; it is something inherently self-contradictory, but it is no less the resolved contradiction; it is the ground which contains the determinations it bears. The thing, the subject or the concept, each as reflected into itself within its sphere, is their contradiction as resolved; but the whole sphere of each is in turn determinate, diverse, and therefore finite, and this means contradictory. This sphere is not itself the resolution of its higher contradiction but has yet a higher sphere for its negative unity, for its ground. Finite things, in their indifferent variety, are therefore just*

*this: to be contradictory, internally fractured and bound to return to their ground.*[40]

…

*Becoming is the first concrete thought, and therefore the first notion: whereas Being and Nought are empty abstractions. The notion of Being, therefore, of which we sometimes speak, must mean Becoming; not the mere point of Being, which is empty Nothing, any more than Nothing, which is empty Being. In Being then we have Nothing, and in Nothing, Being; but this Being which does not lose itself in Nothing is Becoming. Nor must we omit the distinction, while we emphasise the unity of Becoming; without that distinction we should once more return to abstract Being. Becoming is only the* ***explicit*** *statement of what Being is in its truth.*[41]

In one sense, the *bilaterality* of Being and Non-Being (or Nothing) in Hegel is for all to see; his inclusion of the two creates opposing poles where their *mediation* (or determination) is defined as a *Becoming* (a Becoming that we all live in). In another sense, the relation between Being and Non-Being is *unilateral* for Hegel because Non-Being can only ever be recuperated into the finitude of 'things' or their 'negative unity' which is itself contained on the side of Being (as its contradictory *identity*). In this regard, one might succeed in totalising Hegel's absolute system heuristically or hermeneutically through this perpetual recuperation of Non-Being into Being, yet this elusive Non-Being is only ever "exhibited" in the forms of *our world*, and *vicariously* at that; Non-Being is only implied through Becoming (or the Being of Becoming) and never through 'itself'. In this sense (1) the conceptual, rational, logical or phenomenological incarnation of the absolute is only ever a "whole" or "totality of relations"[42] in relation to a Non-Being which *itself cannot be totalised* but only partially exhibited. It is in fact *Becoming* which attempts to *absolutise* Being and Non-Being in the sense that the present (actuality) is always the *absolute centre* for this mediation and conversion; instantiation absolutises non-central, multiple, virtual time into a unified, central actual

[40] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Science of Logic*, Cambridge University Press, 2010. 384

[41] Part One of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences: The Logic. First Subdivision. VII. BEING. (my bold font).

[42] Collapse Vol. 3, p. 400. Urbanomic. 2012 (reissued edition).

time (the same process critiqued by Hamilton Grant's accusation of Hegel converting "anteriority" into "an ideal differentiation within an actual eternity", but also the same operation that Kant utilises in his theory of the unity of the manifold in perception). In Hegel, if you affirm eternity (or infinity), then you are *always in the centre*, between eternal past and eternal future. In other words, every actuality is the centre of eternity/infinity. (2) This absolute returns us to our earlier formulation of the *absolute-as-object* (Harman) because here the object (earth) can convert or *translate* alterity and difference into an element of itself, as "aspects of the earth" and also as the centrifugal absolutisation of Being and Non-Being qua the human's unification of such through experience/the present (Hegel) or if you prefer *prehension* (Harman). Please note, this concept of the absolute object still applies whether we wish to regard the object earth as a unity with various "divisible sub-components" (Harman) that can be treated as objects in their own right, or whether we wish to define earth as one holistic enterprise conforming more traditionally to relational ontologies.

It is also worth adding, as an aside, that the centrality (or actuality) of thought in Hegel does not *co-constitute* its reality. Human thought is something that emerges out of a series of previous sublations, and I see no reason why this cannot be associated with a form of logical evolution proximate to orthodox theories of evolution. Thought may emerge from a series of logical unfoldings found in the passing of time (times inherent preservation of moments) or the various sublations of object–object interactions described in Hegel's *philosophy of nature*, and in this sense thought is *encompassed* by the guiding logical trajectories associated with Spirit, but this does not imply that thought is intrinsic to the objects it observes. Only *absolute knowledge*, which attempts to *identify* the *difference* between the subject and its objects, is capable of speculatively sublating all objects and differences into an ideal knowledge based on the integration of logical and conceptual opposition and contradiction. It is this meta-knowledge which presupposes/implies the *bilaterality* of subjects and objects (i.e. the objects correlation with thought/knowledge but also the reciprocal movement of their mutual development found in society, politics, civilisation, etc.) and not human thought itself. Hegel's realism is nowhere more explicit than in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* where he states:

> The object is: it is what is true, or it is the essence. It is, regardless of whether it is known or not: and it remains, even if it is not known, whereas there is no knowledge if the object is not there.[43]

This only corroborates the *asymmetrical* notion that knowledge is dependent on objects (exhibited through logical Spirit), whilst objects are not dependent on the 'advanced' level of sublationary thought ascribed to human consciousness. Hegel's caveat is of course that, even though objects are not dependent on the emergence of human thought, such thought can *retrospectively* redefine prior objects as richer and more fulfilled objects because they have now been admitted into a series of developing, logical categories. As soon as we realise that such logical categories are within reality (not simply housed in human beings or the mental but a product of nature and therefore a logical condition for human organisms), then the conceptual identification of the object by the subject integrates itself into a shared reality or awareness that the object can itself possess as part of its reality (i.e. the speculative dialectical-transcendental method for Hegel).

* * *

The question of whether objects can exist 'in-themselves' ('for themselves'—Hegel) or possess an 'in-itself' (Kant, Harman), seems at first very similar, but when one prises them apart, one finds that Hegel's 'for itself' must take on a *process* whereby its particularity and determinateness is translated or retroactively re-inscribed into a universal aspect and a 'self-fulfilling" Notion. In other words, we have an intriguing mix of Platonism and Aristotelianism; individual substances are capable of realising themselves through their participation in a *whole* that aims at understanding itself teleologically, both as purpose but also as 'Idea'. The in-itself, on the other hand, does not require the element of 'necessity'[44]

[43] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 59.

[44] One could also argue, as Meillassoux in fact does in *After Finitude*, that Kant's noumenal category is linked to the necessity of non-contradiction; "The thing-in-itself exists, otherwise there would be appearances without anything that appears, which for Kant is contradictory" (Q.M, After Finitude, 2012, p. 31). Alternatively thought, however, one could say that it is not a contradiction for the 'object' to be both appearance and non-appearance.

(unless one argues that phenomena necessarily implies noumena) and would still 'withdraw' from any self-mediating process as both a 'ready-to-hand' and 'present-at-hand' entity 'for itself'. As Hegel understood it, the 'for itself' is not incompatible with human consciousness and perception; it shows itself as purposive, whilst a noumenal identity would remain closed-off in both its mode of appearing and its participation in various relations that give it its teleological existence (existence is *determination* for Hegel in many ways).

The question, or area of interest, for me is whether these two can be combined in a rather strange set of circumstances. Whether the absolute 'for itself' of the earth, which conditions its own *possibility*[45] (bio-logical organisms and its phenomena for example) exists (as a self-determination) within an *incommensurable space*, a space which cannot simply create the conditions for anything to be "viewed from the outside" as an object (Harman). A 'space (or outside) so foreign to the gravitational space and time dilation of earth and all the a priori and synthetic a priori (let alone dialectical, sublative and syllogistic) methods that now appear as merely *tellurian* models of human, rational thought and identity. In other words, what if the 'outside' is not as generic and one-sided as we have defined it? I have already argued that every externality must have a corresponding internality[46] (whether in this universe or another) and I believe this to be a fundamental presupposition of object-oriented ontology because—after all—there is nothing but objects in such an ontology. However, there must be *different outsides*, and these outsides must be elements of other objects (whether micro or mega), and sometimes these exteriors, that are parts of other interiors (as objects) are posited as fundamentally incompatible with other interiors and exteriors (objects) such as the infinity of "causally unconnected mini-universes" (Linde) with fundamentally "different local laws of physics"[47] (Ellis).

Is it possible that *radically* different spatio-temporal objects could still be bridged by the *sensual*, just as I can perceive the moon without it perceiving me back (and without me having to embody the conditions of

[45] Or, alternatively, conditions its own *reality*.

[46] This is the general premise of my latest book Object-Oriented Dialectics (2022, Mimesis).

[47] Ellis, F.R, George. Does the Multiverse Really Exist?

that object which would surely terminate my existence)? Could this still occur even if objects were not embedded in some 'shared common space'[48] that Harman describes? When Hegel states that "the planet is the veritable prius, the subjectivity in which these differences are merely moments of an ideal nature", this is not simply some anthropocentric (or earth-centric) predilection, it is the result of hundreds of pages of Hegelian metaphysics whereby difference and alterity is translated into identity and quality (appropriated by the subject and the object), where contingency is translated into the necessity of how this effect has its own logical, unfolding character *intrinsic to the object*. If "all dialectical thought-paths lead to the Absolute Idea",[49] that is, the *same* Absolute Idea, then what is intrinsic to an object that allows for this "unfolding" to occur? What allows the *object of the subject* to determine these 'necessary' "thought-phases" or "shapes of consciousness"? What allows the object-like forms of the 'Notion' to "align themselves and lead on to one another as necessary"?

I remember once speaking to a colleague about the concept of dualism and he stated it in such a way that it immediately chimed with my own thoughts. He said that dualism was a position one may get to when they arrive at a series of relations or connections that simply cannot be attained or posited as plausible anymore. Is there a *dualistic operation inherent in the notion of translation*, of relation and non-relation, of inside and outside; not simply the irreducibility of either of these sides into each other, but also the *impasse*; that every external object, phenomena or affect can only be conceived of through the *insides* of various objects and never as a blanket term, never 'a view from nowhere', or some prelapsarian objectivity? Hegel, of course, regards this internal unfolding or translation as *logical*; this is what gives translation its consistency (its 'universal' character). But should all translations be characterised as logical in this way, and should all translations be universalisable as a consistent operation across the board? I wonder if we could assert that *translation requires an object*, yet what the object is translating *may not be an object itself*. In this sense, not everything *is an object* (with room for the unique Hegelian possibility

[48] Harman, Graham. On Vicarious Causation. p. 190. Collapse 2. Urbanomic. 2007.

[49] Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford University Press. 1977, p. 178.

that *processes may be becoming objects*). And finally, could the various ways in which an object translates be *absolutely different*, like the "infinity of universes no longer in any causal connection with one another – so free to develop in different ways" (Andrei Linde) ? If the *earth* is an object that creates its own possibilities of translation, an object so distinct that it may not be replicable anywhere else in the universe, the question of how such cosmological objects relate to one another *within* some "shared space" should not be dismissed so naively as a false problem; the relativity of space-time does not have to suggest some merging continuum of different yet simultaneous perspectives, it can also depict a very different picture; that the observed rate at which time passes for an object depends on the *object's velocity relative to the observer*. And how long before this *local* relativity between an object and its observer (or—allowing objects to have their own modes of *prehension*—an object and another object) becomes detached from themselves and other simultaneous observer–object correlations[50]? For example, we know through Einstein's 'relativity of simultaneity' theory that two events, simultaneous for one observer, may not be simultaneous for another observer if the observers are in relative motion, and we also know that—regardless of *observer* motion—movement, speed and mass are all determining conditions in the measurement of any object whatsoever (whether we use an *inertial* (Newtonian) frame of reference regarding the specific object or a *relative* frame of reference which takes into account the 'local field' which posits the object). Furthermore, general relativity also provides the argument for the possibility of how gravitational fields slow the passage of time and hence movement *for an object* as seen by an observer *outside* the field.[51] Hence, the theory of relativity does not always denote shared relative spaces (correspondence) that *co-constitute* each other but rather denotes distinctions whereby one object's specific mass can determine the passage of time differently from another object.

Regarding the importance of 'inner' and 'outer' intuitions of time and space in Kant, one can immediately see how the 'transcendental aesthetic' may be stretched and even exposed as 'human-all-too-human' regarding

[50] This is called the 'relativity of simultaneity' in Einsteinian 'special relativity'.

[51] This is called 'time dilation' in Einsteinian 'special relativity'.

Einstein's theory of relativity (similar to Meillassoux's critique of the 'correlationists circle' of auto-posited time and space).[52] However, as I have previously stated, this relativistic vision of space-time only provides us with spatio-temporal *simultaneity*; inside the limits of an inertial frame of reference, that is, relative to a *static object* and/or a specific local observer, both ensconced between a specific domain of *relationality* between the two. Einstein almost becomes a Kantian in his refusal to both think time and space outside of *a* relation (between a 'frame of reference' modelled between subjects and objects) and, outside relationality *tout court*. Even the distortion of space-time in a black hole is relative to an *absolute* picture of space-time; as a blanket, malleable term without any autonomous domains or discrete, discontinuous units (the example in philosophy could be a relativistic, process philosophy antithetical to Harman's non-relational 'presentism' of objects). In other words, the curvature of space-time is directly related to the energy and momentum of whatever matter and radiation are present; it is relative. However, relative to what? Relative to the observer, relative to the 'frame of reference', that is, the specific, local site between two objects, or simply relative to some extrapolated indifferent, neutral state of the universe ('cosmic homeostasis' or the 'perfect cosmological principle')? Any theory of relativity that is *pushed towards infinite ends* can either be depicted as an *absolute* space-time (ironically) that forever mediates the mass, energy and momentum of the matter that inhabits it, or, can be pushed to at least conceive of radically different (infinite?) multiverses of radical deviation:

> Our universe contains particles such as electrons and quarks interacting through forces such as electromagnetism; other universes may have very different types of particles and forces—which is to say, different local laws of physics. The full set of allowed local laws is known as the landscape. In some interpretations of string theory, the landscape is immense, ensuring a tremendous diversity of universes.[53]

[52] See Meillassoux, Quentin, After Finitude, 2019 edition, Ch. 1: Ancestrality.

[53] Ellis, F.R., George. Does the Multiverse Really Exist? See online article; https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/does-the-multiverse-really-exist/.

It is worth mentioning here that the author of this passage, George F. R. Ellis, is one of the world's leading experts on Einstein's general theory of relativity and co-author, with Stephen Hawking, of the seminal book *The Large Scale Structure of Space-Time*.[54] Ellis shows how an interest in Einsteinian relativity can quickly turn into a fully blown account of radically different theories of universes with different "local laws of physics". His advocacy of the notion of the big bang as an emerging self-conditioning object is also of great significance to us in relation to the possibility of absolute objects with their own delineated/contained conditions of possibility.

To re-engage emphasis on the *object* in theories of relativity causes an interesting, disoriented, fragmented and discontinuous effect whereby the object is in cahoots with various transformations of space-time and has relative agency over its observer (relative to movement, it is the object's *mass* which determines the strength of its gravitational attraction to other 'bodies'). Furthermore, change, whether related to the speed or mass (gravitational pull) of the object, is always discerned *through objects themselves*; no objects in the universe means no evidence of such change and speed in the universe. However, as I will argue later on in this chapter, both Meillassoux and Harman are guilty of *absolutising* this *relative* description of time and space as a blanket, arbitrary, non-object-oriented spatio-temporality; either as an absolute 'Time' of 'hyper-chaos' whereby the earth-as-object, or the "temporality of the living and/or thinking" is simply "inscribed within a temporality in which this relation is merely one event amongst others", or whether the production (or emergence) of time and space derives from an infinity of objects which all have the *same* type of tensions (*space* as "the tension between real object and sensual quality, *time* as the tension between a sensual object and its respective sensual qualities existing within the "experience" of some object, whether human or otherwise"[55]).

[54] Ellis, F.R., George, and Hawking, Stephen, *The Large Scale Structure of Space-Time*, Cambridge University Press, 1975.

[55] Young, Niki citing Graham Harman's definition of space and time in Harman, G. (2011c) 'The Road to Objects', SubStance, 40(2), pp. 171–179. Young's own paper is included in this volume.

Although Kant upholds the existence of an unorganised 'manifold' that is presented to the senses but not directly experienced,[56] there is a uniform and consistent 'space of reasons' between object and observer stemming from the systematically ordered categories of our understanding and Kant's investment in Newtonian physics. For example, Kant suggests that one can "follow the clue given by the categories and bring into play the moving forces of matter according to their quantity, quality, relation, and modality".[57]Kant's philosophy (similar to Hegel after him) is obsessed with the relation between object and observer (phenomenology) and the above passage entertains a Kantian synthesis of the Newtonian laws, but what it also illuminates for us is that this certainty can now appear stymied due to the various manipulations of objects and their space-times that twentieth-century science affords us. The intuitional space and time of the transcendental in Kant may only be founded on a relative ground and not an absolute one.[58] One way of de-absolutising Kant's 'correlationism' is to suggest other spaces and times that exceed or threaten the unity of the manifold accomplished by (phenomenal) experience and the corresponding 'categories'. What might potentially link a philosopher like Harman to a physicist like Andrei Linde is a positive object-oriented theory of emerging times and spaces—as 'objects' or 'bubbles'—causally unconnected and autonomous from one another, with speculative scope outside of human correlationism; whether defined as tellurian/physical or *a priori* (analytical) which—as we have tried to show in this chapter—is still fundamentally tied to a *physics of logic* found in Hegel. Meillassoux makes the radical alterity of differing space-times something commensurate with earth by making the distinction merely *chronological* as opposed to spatial (or object-oriented). For example, his acknowledgement of the diachronic temporality exemplified by the arche-fossil emphasises a temporality prior to the "givenness" or 'manifestation' co-constituted by any human (and presumably animal) consciousness. Yet this time of the diachronic is still a time that dwells in or on the earth prior to human life; it

[56] The nature of the unstructured manifold is unknowable.

[57] Kant, Immanuel. *Opus Postumum*. Cambridge University Press, p. 25. 1998 edition.

[58] Furthermore, the chaotic 'manifold' that Kant contrasts to his unified categories may in fact be the pure giveness of tellurian powers; an experience resulting from the earth's organisation of indeterminacy—and not the mind's structuring by the means of concepts.

is not a time completely incommensurate with human perception and neither is it a time that stretches our relativistic hypothesis towards the radically different existing times and spaces that may possibly emerge throughout various uncharted domains of relativistic space-time. This is reflected in Meillassoux's claim that the 'in-itself'—as a concept—is something that simply precedes *the time of* human consciousness, but what exists beyond the 'for us' of the correlation should be formulated as existing *simultaneously with human consciousness*; Harman's 'in itself' of present objects or the hypothesis of *present* inconceivable universes beyond our conditions of possibility. Meillassoux does not succeed in de-absolutising Kant's transcendental philosophy by conceiving of different conditions of space-time that would produce differing cognitive and non-cognitive models of reality (i.e. Andrei Linde's *self-reproducing inflationary universe theory*[59] or even possibly a theory of autonomous translation that could be interpreted in Harman's work). Rather, Meillassoux deabsolutises Kantian correlationism by ensconcing it within an *absolute time* that has the capacity to be all types of uniform and non-uniform times/durations within the one same (absolute/hyper-chaotic) medium. This rules out the production of spaces and times as 'bubbles' or 'objects' autonomous or distinct from other domains of space-time (and whatever realities ensue from such physical conditions) and in-fact re-absolutises time as a 'hyper-chaos' whereby its only internal differences or domains are always re-conflated into a radical contingency that *moves* from difference to difference (or similarity to similarity) as opposed to actually including or supporting discrete differences within itself.

Yet we can also see Kant as the harbinger of the speculative real par excellence (and not simply some relativist, critical philosopher) because, however much Kant tries to find universal truths in analytic statements and the specific *a priori* structuring of thought, there is always this remainder (the noumenal) that Kant himself universalises without us knowing anything 'about' such a category. This is where the 'for itself' of an Hegelian self-determined absolute earth (as a self-correlated object) meets the Kantian, ontological impasse of an external reality distinct from its translation; whether this be an external world or universe of

[59] See Linde, Andrei, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-self-reproducing-inflationary-u/.

objects which are not correlated to the earth as logical stages of its development/Idea, or whether it be *external worlds* and multiverses (plural) and the ways in which such realities do not conform *directly* to the 'transcendental conditions' of phenomena we designate to either mind or nature, nor the transcendental analytic that attempts to prove the application of the categories to phenomena. Other objects may have their own independent criteria for the manifestation of their reality.

* * *

I think there are reasonable grounds to refute the claim that Hegel is an *absolute correlationist*. The claim may stem from the supplementary convergence/correlation of both Thinking and Being, as well as the same dialectical co-constitution of Being and Non-Being. However, there are at least three things to consider here: (1) thought emerges from nature (derivative of Being in general) and—according to Hegel—nature (and Being) is seen to already contain a type of thought; the logical preservation and culmination of instances found in (dialectical) time and the logical operation of sublation found in the 'teleological' descriptions of natural kinds in Hegelian philosophy. Human thought simply re-cognises these prenatal impulses in non-anthropocentric reality, recuperates their logical or ideational form, and adds this re-cognition into a speculative account of reality that integrates the human awareness of identity and thought-forms into reality itself as a continual, supplementary medium of absolute (developing) reality. (2) The correlation of Being with Non-Being (or even Being with Thinking) might be an absolute one (*eventually*) but it is not one that can be *identified* in any straight-forward manner; there is no Being of an object or entity that is identical with itself: There are a multiplicity of obstacles for admission into such self-reconciliatory objecthood such as the difference between form and content, the difference between self and other that formulates a dialectics of perception and awareness as the "being through another/the other", the difference that finitude places in the heart of the object which is never fully X or non X, and this final dialectic is mirrored on a larger stage between the convergence of the Being and Non-Being of an object, entity

or occurrence, which is expressed, mediated and determined through a mutual Becoming that restores the two opposing terms. (3) The Becoming that mediates both Being and Non-Being is a *singularity*; it is only one way of actualising Being and Non-Being and furthermore it fails to reduce, exhaust or totalise both Being and Non-Being through this process. As we will see, this will lead us to a Hegelian *speculative realism* that posits the possible (existing or non-existing) actualisations of the abstract categories of Being and Non-Being through Becomings that are not correlated to our very own specific Becoming (i.e. our tellurian, physical time and space and its logic of conditions of possibility (dialectical unfolding/necessity)). We will look at these three counterarguments in more detail below.

There is a historical account of the dialectic where "at the origins of being lie many states of things that are inert, external, purposeless, mechanical, contingent, irregular, empirical and brutally real".[60] It is simply that Being will never be the same once the intrinsic syllogisms of nature develop, distribute and integrate themselves into a totality commensurate with human thought. A totality which acquires universal *belonging* (everything is a proponent of the universal syllogism in one way or another) and furthermore, human self-reflexivity (Hegelian 'consciousness') incarnates this absolute assimilation as a *totality aware of itself*—what we call reality (objective reality or 'the Idea' for Hegel). In other words, Hegel's correlationism is historically contingent yet it is believed that the logical element of any contingent set of events will bring itself forward out of necessity and re-appropriate such said, contingent events as both retrospectively necessary and *conscious* (reflexivity is the necessary result of the Idea that must become conscious of itself as but another sublated stage of its journey). It is not enough for something to just 'be' in Hegel's philosophy. Hegel's dialectical system is set-up precisely to show how it is *identity* which plays itself out in Being (or Becoming) itself: its movement into its opposite, its contradiction, its negation, its negation of negation, the larger designation of the *identity of* identity *and* difference; the sublation of a new identity which contains its prior differences, etc.

[60] Findlay. J.N. *Ascent to the Absolute*. 2019 edition. Routledge, p. 132.

But it is not just humans that triumph from this eventual correlation (humans as that *particular universality* we call Subjects); universals "enjoy a sunken, implicit existence *in* natural objects, and they also enjoy some sort of being *beneath* the surface of natural objects, as the essences or forces which explain them".[61] The question that any speculative realist should ask in this instance is—why do we come to this actualised set of circumstances? If we accept Hegel's thesis on the dialectical accountability of both necessity and contingency, then we might be able to acknowledge *how* such circumstances have actualised themselves through history—*this* history—as one trajectory—but not why other passages have been closed off or terminated. In J.N. Findlay's words:

> *There is no reason then to think that Hegel thought that the path traced in the Phenomenology, though consisting throughout of necessary steps, was the only path that the conscious spirit could have taken in rising from sensuous immediacy to absolute knowledge. It was the path that* ***had*** *been taken by the World Spirit in past history, and that had been rehearsed in the consciousness of Hegel … But this involves no pronouncement as to what pathway to Science would be taken by men in the future, nor as to what pathway would have been taken in other thinkable world situations.*

This last point is gently directing us to a truth in Hegel that has been hitherto locked up due to the one-dimensional interpretation of Hegel's triad of logical categories (Being, Non-Being and Becoming). It is this same discovery that gives Meillassoux a lump in his throat every time he publicly makes Hegel a quasi-exception to his theory of correlationism without fully qualifying this. For example, in his talk at the Speculative Realism conference of 2007 at Goldsmiths, he states that "correlation between thought and being has many different forms … of course this process is far more elaborate than I can describe here, especially in Hegel".[62] Or "if you say that facticity is a fact, that even contingency is contingent, what are you saying? The only one who can say that is Hegel".[63] And again, "you are unable to demonstrate the necessity of

[61] Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford University Press, 1977, p. xi (Foreword).
[62] Meillassoux, Quentin. Collapse Vol 3, p. 427, Urbanomic. 2012 reissued edition.
[63] Ibid., p. 437.

laws—unless you are Hegel".[64] Or, in an online interview published by Urbanomic, "(I)n truth, metaphysics culminates in the contestation of the principles of identity and non-contradiction—once again, it was Hegel who taught me this."[65]

In Hegel's triad of logical categories, he sets his dialectic in motion in what he sees as the most immediate, fundamental and abstract exposition; that between Being and Non-Being (and consequently Becoming). As most know, what we consider to be Being is a *determination* for Hegel in that it is still *Becoming-something*. For example, in the Science of Logic, Hegel states:

> In non-being the relation to being is contained: both being and its negation are enunciated in a single term, nothing, as it is in becoming.[66]

Furthermore, we cannot allow for Becoming to appear transient in its mediation of Being and Non-Being, it also must be something itself:

> Since from nothing only nothing becomes, the proposition does not in fact contain becoming, for in it nothing remains nothing. Becoming implies that nothing does not remain nothing but passes into its other, into being.[67]

That would be *the Being of* its Becoming. However, bracketing off the various determinations involved in this process, there are many who presuppose that this exposition is necessarily absolute (absolute regarding its *universality*); that Hegel is talking about "that which is common to every conceivable object in the universe".[68] However, Hegel is interested in the specific, productive relation between abstract Being and Non-Being *as a determination*. In other words, it is only the specific, actual and concrete production or emergence of a specific *Becoming* (of a spatio-temporal

[64] Ibid., p. 441.

[65] https://www.urbanomic.com/document/founded-on-nothing/.

[66] Hegel's *Science of Logic*. Becoming. Remark 1: The Opposition of Being and Nothing in Ordinary Thinking, p. 135.

[67] Ibid.

[68] An Exposition of the First Triad of Categories of the Hegelian Logic—Being, Non-Being, Becoming. King, Martin Luther, Jr. MLKP, MBU, Martin Luther King, Jr., Papers, 1954–1968, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Centre, Boston University, Boston, MA.

order) that even allows Hegel to deduce the two 'poles' of Being and Non-Being abstractly (or 'in themselves'). Outside of this Becoming it would be up for debate whether Being and Non-Being could even be simply abstract, 'in-itself' categories or empty notions. Hegel tells us nothing about Being and Non-Being *itself* other than as forces manifest in the Becoming of the relation between the two. For example, *negation* is not Nothing but rather the conversion of Nothing's relation to Being *within Becoming*. In truth, one of Hegel's characterisations of this negation—as "moving into its opposite"[69]—seems directed towards the finitude of an object: "(F)inite things, in their indifferent variety, are therefore just this: to be contradictory, internally fractured and bound to return to their ground."[70] In other words, Hegel's *immanence* is precisely in the recognition that *Spirit* is in fact the objectification of a specific, singular relation (or reaction) regarding Being and Non-Being, and certainly not exhaustive of Being and Non-Being or other ways in which such could be mediated (other Becomings). For example, what would Being and Non-Being 'be' outside of the spatio-temporal (tellurian) conditions produced, converted or *translated* by earth's gravitational time dilation, the givenness of particular spatio-temporal phenomena, the quasi-stability of laws that safeguard 'forms', the bio-logical support which allows for a specific form of cognition, etc.?

This is not an attempt to *relativise* Hegel's absolute, but a provocation to *multiply* it; as an event produced and tied to the objects (or materials) that constitute its actuality, as well at their spatio-temporal conditions. *Becoming* then includes its materials and its syntheses and is vulnerable to its own termination (just as an object is). Even if we were to adopt the universalistic language and state that Being is "common to every conceivable object in the universe", we must first revise this statement to state that it is "*Becoming* which is common to every conceivable object in the universe" because Becoming is the only quality/determination of Being *as a mode*, and is not Being itself. What we see is the actuality of Being *as Becoming*, not vice versa and not exhaustive to Being (which presumably is infinite potentiality). Second, even if we were to include 'the universe'

[69] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford University Press. 1977.
[70] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Science of Logic*, Cambridge University Press, 2010. 384.

as the singular plasticity of the event between Being and Non-Being, this is still not completely universal; our universe is but one in an unimaginably massive ocean of universes.

The title iterations of the absolute is meant to question just where we cordon off this absolute, simultaneous immanence of object and produced reality. The possible problem with a Harmanian "shared space" is not that there is some kind of *commensurability* between the "private interiors" of objects and the specific ways in which they negotiate their reality through external determinations (this would simply be the internal unfolding of the 'Idea'—or 'design'—in Hegel), but rather the instantiation of a commensurate *space* situating and encompassing various 'cut-off' objects both microscopic and macroscopic (including the 'hyper-scopic' register of galaxies and multiverses). Harman is right to bring back a kind of occasionalism on a *local scale,* that is, a shared space/condition which allows iterations of absolute objects to interact with one another *within the earth* (tellurian-dialectical space and time formulated by Hegel), yet on the cosmological scale, no such commensurate space may be given because a 'hyper-object' constitutes its own space-time/conditions of possibility due to its specific (alien) qualities, its mass, and its warping of available conditions that soon become *sublated* as part of that objects environment or reality. This power—of an object to redefine external conditions into an autonomous correlate of self-fulfilling reality—is what Hegel intended to demonstrate when he stated that the earth is both "subject and its product". However, regarding both Georges Lemaître, George F. R. Ellis, and new, inflationary accounts of multiverses (Andrei Linde), this mechanism can also be expanded to account for how object and 'environment' become simultaneously produced; the (presumably) spatio-temporal environment is *part of the object itself* (the big bang for example).

Hence, such iterations of the absolute seem more acceptable (or negotiable) *from a local level* as the different ways in which objects and their environment are individually trapped within an absolute fate of Being and Non-Being qua Becoming which is absolutely contained (a singularity which contains its beginning and end—Being and Non Being—and hence absolutises itself). If we were to adhere to Hegel's metaphysics we could say that there is an essential *dialectic* between Being and Non-Being (or relation and non-relation) which reconciles itself in the only way it is

thought that it can; a "negative unity" or identity that includes its contradiction (*this* contradiction) as it stumbles along. Harman says much the same when he states that "space is not the realm of relation, but of both relation and non-relation".[71] How these features of reality work themselves out (or do not) should be characterised as a *dialectical* problem; an intertwined problem, which leads Harman to say that "space can be defined as the tension between real objects and sensual qualities"[72] or that "the relation between an object and its own real qualities (we called this essence) is a relation produced by outside entities".[73] To reiterate, these dialectical operations occur within *a certain space-time* that can account for the phenomenal, can account for the connection between opposites (or at least opposite logical categories), can account for specific physical, biological and chemical interactions or determinations (or "encounters" as Harman calls them). This is the space-time formulated dialectically by Hegel but it cannot be *universalised as all space-times* and hence all conditions of reality. If objects *maintain commensurability* between themselves—*regardless* of their irreducible features—then a *universality of commensuration* is wrongly conceived (whether this involves subsumption/a notion of totality is beside the point), and this definitely becomes problematic regarding a neo-Hegelianism of the infinity of different Becomings from Being and Non-Being, and regarding Andrei Linde's theoretico-physical account of multiverses, which argue for an infinity of "causally unconnected mini-universes".[74] In fact Hegel himself makes a similar mistake; Hegel does not give another thought to developing the idea that Becoming must presuppose a specific mediation of Being and Non-Being (as singularity) and hence there must be other possible mediations of Being and Non-Beng that are different in kind and not just degree. This is because Hegel thinks that the universal (and somewhat abstract) *categories* of Being and Non-Being stay the same, and what changes is only different *modalities* of them. However, it is the

[71] Harman, Graham. The Road to Objects, 2011. SubStance, 40(2), p. 176.

[72] Ibid., p. 176.

[73] Harman, Graham, *The Quadruple Object*. Zer0 Books; Illustrated edition. 2011, p. 106–7.

[74] A.L. Cambridge University preprint, Nuffield Symposium, July 1982 or chrome-extension: https://www.scientificlib.com/en/Astronomy/Cosmology/ChaoticInflationTheory.html.

modality of Being and Non-Being (its Becoming/actualisation) which produces the specific type of reality which these categories will synthetically (relationally) possess. In other words, Hegel takes our cosmological, natural, historical, social Becoming as absolute, not just in a correlational sense (self-relating/self-realising Spirit) but in a universal sense (applicable to every possible entity in every possible reality) because it contains a connection to the absolute category of Being and Non-Being. He prioritises the logical, formal connection to absolute Being and Non-Being, assuming that all modalities of this dialectic will subsequently prevail and develop towards the same one path to the absolute Idea. Yet the point is that the emergent synthesis of the two categories determines retrospectively the type of 'Being' it will become. Hegel conflates Being and Non-Being—as universal conditions—into universal, actual modes inherent in any possible emergence of Being and Non-Being, yet the mode of actuality does not have to contain any actual relation to Being or Non-Being because Being and Non-being are primarily purely formal, empty categories that can only be said to exist after their partial actualisation qua Becoming. Let us use the example of colour; we could say that 'redness' can exist in a variety of different entities, suggesting its universality in its applicability. But can we really say that 'Being' exists as a category in which entities "participate" in? Lots of people do (or used to) but we are saying that this 'Being' cannot be identified in advance of its Becoming. In fact, we do not know what 'Being' is outside of its actualisation with Non-Being as Becoming, hence we are not given the right to designate the absolute or universal 'Being' of 'redness' or anything for that matter. Does Heidegger make this mistake too? Conflating the particular determination (verb) of a 'Being' (Becoming)—and hence its singularity—with a universal (noun) Being pre-existing this process (some "pre-theoretical" and "fundamental" ground); a totalisation that presupposes one condition *over* the many other possible conditions. Even if we allow Heidegger a domain of relative 'present-at-hand' involvements with reality, on the one hand, and a non-relative domain of quasi-Aristotelian real, independent ("withdrawn") substances, on the other hand, these two domains should still only be seen as elements of a singular Becoming and not of any overarching Being. In fact, for Heidegger to maintain a distinction between pre-theoretical human orientation and nature

'in-itself', he must define and restrict 'Being' to an anthropological account of intelligibility. In Thomas Sheehan's words:

> For Heidegger, at every stage of his thinking, "there is no 'is' to things without a taking-as … no sense that is independent of human being. … Before homo sapiens evolved, there was no 'being' on earth… because 'being' for Heidegger does not mean 'in existence'. Indeed, Being concerns sense-making (intelligibility), and the different ways in which entities make sense to us, including as present-at-hand, are dependent on the fact that we are Dasein.

In J.N. Findlay's foreword to Hegel's *Phenomenology*, Findlay also jumps from the Hegelian argument for the intrinsic continuity and commensuration between the laws of objective nature and its objective realisation in consciousness, to a more speculative (and debatable) argument that, this understanding of objective nature—as *reflected* and sublated in subjectivity—must suggest that "all forms of objectivity are identical with those essential to the thinking subject".[75] In other words, that *formal* objectivity (i.e. logical categories) can be applied to all areas of the cosmos. However, both contemporary mathematics and quantum physics have theorised that there are certain conditions in the fabric of space-time that will not comply or reflect such a logic as consistent across different 'phase spaces'. In this sense, one must ask what the word 'essential' means in Findlay's passage; is it just the forms of objectivity that are 'essential' to human existence and understanding which should limit our understanding of objectivity? In this new light, whereby physics prevents the progress of absolute, *universally applicable* logic throughout the cosmos, we get an even stronger sense of Hegel's absolute-correlative spatio-temporal logic of the tellurian object earth; that "the self-externalisation of purely logical categories" … are exhibited in the "sensuous shows of nature and in the contingencies which fill space and time, and that must then study itself returning to itself out of natures externality, a return which will restate the content of the phenomenology in the form of a real history of spirit".[76]

[75] Hegel. G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford University Press. 1977, p. xxviii.
[76] Ibid., p. xxix.

This is not to assume that physics has a more originary ground than Hegelian/dialectical logic and can shatter its core principles, it is rather to suggest that the logical and physical share their own co-produced space, which remains different from other physical-logical spaces such as the tellurian, self-produced/fulfilling model proposed in Hegel's comments on nature and the object earth.

Returning to Hegel, another interesting thought would be that, just because Hegel discloses the particularisation/singularity of Becoming through the logical categories of Being and Non-Being, this does not mean that these categories are themselves logical; their relation may appear logical 'for us'—and emerge as a result of dialectical-logical thinking—but this may be a 'translation' of a rather more complex relation of opposites; is Non-Being unilaterally connected to Being in some way? Is an opposite a logical opposite (something that logic would abstractly and universally presuppose *a priori*) or something specifically produced in contradistinction to an actual, particular, existing object (a posteriori)? In *After Finitude*, Meillassoux distinguishes between the relative possibilities concomitant with certain actual (yet temporal) laws on the one hand (such as the empirical), and the possibility of the coming-to-be and ending of all laws themselves due to his discovery of 'hyper-chaos'. In other words, Hegel absolutises the *a posteriori* 'necessity' of a specific logic disclosed within the non-absolute laws of nature, physics, and even analytic presuppositions and subsequently universalises this (pseudo) 'absolute' logic as the conditions of possibility for any account of (logical) existence (or possible existence). Even Hegel's account of contradiction—as we have seen—is a circular one; harnessed to the *a posteriori* possibility of an entity and its opposite (or non-existence) and not the contradiction of laws (for example) with Hegel claiming that the perpetually negating dialectic driving any object is already somewhat aware of what it is not (i.e. as the identity of opposition or difference intrinsic to its movement/realisation/reconciliation). It is in fact Hegel's own unique formulation of object-contradiction; a logic within the laws of nature and conventional physics that characterises contradiction as "a return to its ground" or a "movement into its opposite" expressed as basically the finitude of the object; Hegel's object—"essence as contradiction".

This leads us to another critical question; could something be absolutised, like (logical) opposites in Hegelian philosophy, without being absolutely verifiable, and what is the criteria of reality that an absolute requires? For example, some linguists may argue that it is the existence of the whole of a system of language that gives credence to the meanings of individual words, while some mathematicians may suggest that the abstract science of number, quantity, and space has absolute scope in that its remit is not relative to any finite or relative amount of numbers nor even any relative physical law (thinks Cantors absolute infinite theorem), etc. But this "self-relating" (Hegel) operation—similar to the system of logic that Hegel ontologises—may have no ontological scope outside of its operation; what are the conditions for language, logic and mathematics? Do we allow these domains to appear (emerge) as containing their own absolute autonomy and are these a kind of absolute correlation similar to the absolute correlations we are speculating in the Becoming of physical objects? The possible mistake here is to absolutise a hermeneutic method and to suggest that it would apply to any set of physical circumstances (because the method itself appears to function *a priori* of experience and physical constraints; mathematics). Hegel makes this mistake and applies his own logical account of universal difference and identity to all possible worlds (as well as suggesting our own world as the best of all possible worlds).

Not only does Hegel himself conflate the abstract and universal category of Being with the type of Being that Becoming actualises (prioritising the abstract category of Being over the real production of partial Being, even though it is the latter that determines what the former is/will be), he also conflates the means in which he discloses the relationship between Being and Non-Being (i.e. the dia-logical method) as a particular spatio-temporal movement (one concomitant with phenomena for example) which will necessarily exist regardless of what type of Becoming is activated. In other words, Hegel absolutises the specific dia-logical movement of space-time (as logical, sublation) based on the absoluteness of his algorithm (its purported universal applicability) yet forgets that this extrapolated universal theory is still only a theory 'for us'; it is only absolute in its self-relating scope and not its universally applicable scope. What appear as *a priori* opposites or laws of difference and identity may

*a posteriori* change after the emergence of a radically novel Becoming of Being and Non-Being. One thing should be emphasised in all of this; if we are right to state that the synthetic emergence of Being and Non-Being (as Becoming) takes priority over any prior, abstract condition, then this complements the notion that the emergence of an object simultaneously creates its own, new conditions of possibility; the 'reality' that is produced from the Big Bang is intrinsic to the 'Bang' itself and cannot be found posterior, anterior or external to its synthetic emergence as an object (returning us to the idea of differing absolute correlates).

Rather than adhering to the universality of this intertwined, dialectically superimposed notion of relation and non-relation *as space* (Harman) and hence as part of the object, or as the *negative unity of the object* (Hegel) reacting to its 'Non-Being', I would argue that there may exist the possibility of radically different times and spaces partially exhibited by planetary objects, with their own independent ways of translating, which are incompatible with the notion of a "shared common space" or even the 'universally' objective "view from nowhere". This does not mean that I cannot sensually translate something exterior to my tellurian conditions of possibility and convert it into "an aspect of earth" (Hegel) *unilaterally* as it were. People are forever situating planets and the universe as transparent, neutral objects of study all inhering in a quasi-Newtonian absolute container, whilst forgetting that they do so qua the instruments of the tellurian, the planets 'for us', and misconstruing time and space as *one* 'given' condition as opposed to concretely produced (multiple) ones.

In this regard, Harman's objects are *not absolute enough* (in the sense of absolute *independence*); whether as independently *contained* objects on earth, or as the possibility of radically different kinds of objects with their own agency regarding the *active constitution of times and spaces* and not the passive incarnation of a *generic* space and time as simply both relational and non-relational. Instead of a universality of object–object interactions making up the cosmos[77] all sharing the same common space, I would argue that gravitational time dilation fundamentally alters the space and

[77] As fellow object-oriented thinker Timothy Morton puts it: "There is no "outside"—just the entire universe of entities constantly interacting, and you are one of them." Morton, Timothy, Morgan Meis, Timothy Morton's Hyper-Pandemic, The New Yorker, June 8th, 2021.

time exhibited by any planet (and such is purportedly only a *degree* of the absolute difference of *kind* achievable). Harman is right to recharacterise space and time against their parochial formulation as "peerless dimensions of the universe",[78] but the price to pay for making such dimensions immanent *tensions* within the correlate of an object (or hyper-object), that is, as tensions between different qualities of the/an object, is the radical *discontinuity* between different objects and their different relative (or correlational) translations of reality. This price to pay should be fully acknowledged and affirmed along the same lines as Linde's inflationary universe theory. However, it seems that there is a subtle difference of approach here; while some of us want a radical thesis on autonomous object-oriented realities, we also wish to *affirm* the commensurability between an object and its environment (or product) yet disavow the notion that the conditions of relationality and non-relationality that produce objects are all arbitrarily the same. In other words, object and environment *must* be the same on a larger scale because it is the object that simultaneously produces its conditions of possibility (like the earth, which reflects its structure within every object and process it possesses[79]). However, this then leaves room for a variety of self-produced objects absolutely incommensurate with each other cosmologically (yet I am also arguing that all objects everywhere show degrees/iterations of this absolute self-production in a fascinating way). The possible problem with Harman's thesis is not the idea that an objects 'tensions' can produce specific spaces and times (spatio-temporality as derivative of the object), but rather that *an object is at odds with its own environment.* I think we can use Hegel to show how the object is dialectically complicit/implicated in its environment necessarily and that this correlation of object and environment has an absolute (contained) power to it as well as proposing radically other correlations of object and product that do not coexist in the same blanket space (isn't 'space' a

[78] Harman, Graham, Time, Space, Essence, and Eidos: A New Theory of Causation. p. 1. Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy, vol. 6, no. 1, 2010.

[79] I speak about the commensuration between an object's interior and exterior (object and product) in detail in my book *Object-Oriented Dialectics*. I use the biological description of Eukaryotic cells to show how tellurian thought and nature can be ensconced within an immanent object with specific properties and conditions. The domain Eukaryota makes up one of the three domains of life; bacteria and archaea make up the other two domains.

non-neutral, specific object itself, 'outer space' being different from the gases and properties of earths 'space' for example?).

The speculative question for me in both Hegel and Harman's work is this: How are we to understand objects—whether as 'withdrawn' objects, self-fulfilling 'Ideas', or 'the earth'—in *degrees* of autonomy, as a variety of iterations of containment which could culminate in absolute differences in *kind*?

In this sense, we are not here looking into a reality of object-oriented interactions, but rather into *object-oriented realities*. An object can be its own conditions of reality. This is not explicitly against the theory of relativity, it simply emphasises the misanthropic element of relativism; not that everything is connected due to varying, relative points in space and time, but on the contrary, that one's relative space and time can be radically different from another. One could even speculate upon a non-time and non-space (are there other ways of 'mediating' Being and Non-Being in Hegel's radically speculative system?). In this sense, I would argue for the rehabilitation of a traditional occasionalism which emphasises the possible 'side by side' nature of objects culminating in the strict autonomy of different multiverses; something that bypasses the *local* dialectical model of *tension* (between real objects and sensual qualities for example[80]) and hence bypasses the notion that relation and non-relation are *universalised as the same relation and non-relation that exists everywhere within all cosmoses*.

The immanent integration of relation and non-relation (which should be seen as an achievement itself in Harman's work), as co-constitutive of reality (the Becoming of Hegel's Being and Non-Being) becomes pejoratively *co-constitutive of all of reality universally*, as a generic and uniform operation across the board, as opposed to the dialectic of relation and non-relation being produced and mediated by the specific *objects themselves*: as *specific* relations and non-relations *incompatible* with others; a pluralism of various kinds of what Hegel used to call 'Beginnings' and "Ends" of the produced relational/non-relational dialectic itself (as objects). This thesis champions different relations, different non-relations, different objects that mediate these spatio-temporal 'contradictions'

[80] Or between internal impetus or internal structure of objects as 'Ideas' in Hegel, pitted against.

(Hegel), different times, different spaces. Some spaces and times cannot be placed across the board but instead demand their own 'zone' or object. Regarding Linde's work on inflationary multiverses, he states that we can predict that certain parts of even our own universe will be "inefficient regarding the laws of mathematics and physics"[81]:

> *There are some parts of the multiverse where information processing is inefficient; we cannot live there. We can only live in those parts of the multiverse where the laws of mathematics and physics allow stable information processing and reliable predictions. That is why physics and mathematics are so efficient in our part of the multiverse.*[82]

Whether this is another brand of anthropocentrism or correlationism ("we cannot live there"… so subsequently we cannot know?) or whether it is an almost Meillassouxian *intellectual intuition* into an independent reality of 'unreason' and 'hyper-chaos' incommensurable with our/any mathematical and physical models, and subsequently, human subjectivity and the phenomenological model of 'givenness', can be left to the thoughtful reader to ponder.

The new speculative realist dialectic is not one between thinking and being, but between the infinite possibility of modes of Being and Non-Being and its actual event/incarnation into an object or material that includes this genesis within it (and can even be destroyed). Condition and ground then become synchronic (they are produced *absolutely* at the same time as self-contained—like a "bubble"[83]), as any absolute object can be plucked into existence and contain its own conditions of reality, just as our universe negotiates its own material as both its own contents and its own ground.

If Hegel can be said to achieve anything in this regard, it is that he formulated (correctly or incorrectly) *the earth* as that absolute object which grounds its own conditions of possibility that converts the

[81] A.L. Cambridge University preprint, Nuffield Symposium, July 1982 or chrome-extension: https://www.scientificlib.com/en/Astronomy/Cosmology/ChaoticInflationTheory.html.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Linde frequently uses the image of bubbles to describe mini-universes.

differences ostensibly *other* or *external* to it as an *identified difference* (the negation of negation), which allows both Spirit and its product (self-consciousness) to subsume aspects of difference as a material always commensurate with it. However, that *identity* (both 'for us' and 'for itself' in Hegel) requires various *objects*, enduring through a specific setting of space and time, employing phenomenal forms that are purportedly the highest manifestation of what Hegel terms the 'syllogism',[84] suggests that this absolute conversion is just as much tied to the object earth's properties and qualities, both emergent and as "a unified reality that is not exhausted by any relation to it".[85] In other words, this (at least) provokes the possibility of multiple absolutes and not the generally accepted view of a large, interconnected, unified cosmos with areas of relative stability, which give us the *illusion* of absolute (self-identical) knowledge.

In my latest book *Object-Oriented Dialectics: Hegel, Heidegger, Harman*, I argue for a more compromised, common ground between such iterations of the absolute. Hegel finds the vocabulary to speak of mind, appearance, objects and subjects as the many movements of one self-productive, logical activity (he even finds a way to subordinate generic space and time into necessary characteristics of Spirit, which aid the trajectories of objects, relations and sublations). Hegel's space and time is a very specific space and time; one that mixes the logical with the tellurian. However, conflation and fluidity does not ensue from this act of monism; organisms, Ideas, and even collectives, find a way to self-organise and express this unity "qua the whole".[86] Inner and outer are pitted against each other, as internal intuition (design), and seed (Idea), are defined in contradistinction to external actuality and mechanism. In this respect, objects (of all different kinds) do not mesh into one another but translate one another (Harman) and "retain" (Hegel) novel differences as they encounter one another. There is even an implicit taxonomy of objects in Hegel, from the merely external to the purposive, the criteria being whether the object becomes sublated into a larger whole (as a piece) or

[84] See Allen Porter's brilliant paper entitled The Syllogism In Hegel's Logic - https://www.academia.edu/8931115/The_Syllogism_In_Hegels_Logic.

[85] Harman, Graham, Collapse Vol. 3, Urbanomic, 2012 edition, p. 377.

[86] Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford University Press. 1977, p. 179 (Observing Reason).

whether the object becomes a 'whole piece' in its own right.[87] It wouldn't be completely absurd to link this taxonomy to a spectrum of non-relational to relational objects in Harman's taxonomy (from what he would call the "dormant object" to a polypsychism of objects that equates *relating* to a kind of perceiving/prehending). I would like to add, however, that Hegel's ontology extends the finite quality Harman gives to objects/subjects and knowledge (a 'la Kant) and offers us more of a trans-finite quality regarding the existence of an object; it isn't quite enough for the object to just *be* (as self-identical), it must also be in relation to an 'Other', its contradiction, or non-being. In J.N. Findlay's words:

> *Pure Being is a would-be concrete notion, but it does nothing to substantiate its claim. What it sets out before us, an object that is and no more, and which is without definite character, is also indistinguishable from the absence of an object which it claims to exclude*.[88]

If Hegel's notion of the absolute has some merit, if the particular can reflect the whole (and vice versa) through a variety of instantiations and capacities, then this absolute is therefore reflected in the objects that express it, and hence each individual object has an *iteration of the absolute*, just as "each detail has within itself a miniature of the whole"[89] or (my personal favourite) "the eternal is at any rate more of a frill on the dress than an idea".[90] This does not have to be construed as the now prosaic sentiment that each detail reflects the whole, it can also mean that each divisible unit contains in some variable degree the retractive power of absolute containment within it; to *withdraw* (Harman), to *retain (Hegel), to* limit and to demarcate itself. I have speculated upon this metaphysical mechanism of withdrawal in the object—its relation to absolute containment and the unilateral way in which the object converts Non-Being into itself as if a negative feedback loop—and have since found analogies in

[87] Hegel's remarks on the concept of utility are very useful in this respect. See section Absolute Freedom and Terror in *The Phenomenology* (p. 355). Oxford University Press. 1977.

[88] Findlay J.N. *Ascent to the Absolute*. Routledge. 2019 edition, p. 134.

[89] Kany, Roland. "Particularism in the Work of Walter Benjamin." Criticism 32, no. 3 (1990): 325–41, p. 325. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23112048.

[90] Ibid., p. 325.

the logarithmic spirals of nature which "causes plants to condense themselves and not take up as much space, causing it to be stronger and more durable against the elements".[91]

Returning to Hegel's triad of logical categories, his exposition is not meant to simply show the *immanence* of the active, singular correlation between abstract Being and Non-Being, as a process which is itself its own object (*becomes* its own object). It is also more *speculative* in that it leaves on the intellectual table what other *unactivated* Becomings could arise from Being and Non-Being, or, in other words, what Being and Non-Being can offer outside of this particular instantiation of Becoming that Hegel calls the dialectic (or Spirit), which Hegel tends to identify with the 'hyper-object'[92] *earth* (but could very well be the universe, such as some theoretical physicists attest to[93]).

For me, this now becomes a Meillassouxian project; it is *not* about the time 'not given to thinking being,[94] and it is *not* the question—"how are we to think the coming into being of consciousness and its spatio-temporal forms of givenness in the midst of a space and time which are supposed to pre-exist the latter"[95] because, before human consciousness—at least in Hegel—we are to assume that the absolute correlative conditions of reality (and thinking as an extension of it) are still inherent in the object (earth) and the singular way it exhibits spatio-temporal (logical) activity (already seen in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*). In other words, space and time are as old as the earth itself and do not problematise human 'phenomenal' consciousness (and its 'modes' of givenness). Such modes come into existence as a quality of the earth similar to how an

[91] The Franklin Institute. Math Patterns in Nature: https://www.fi.edu/math-patterns-nature#:~:text=The%20reason%20for%20why%20plants,more%20durable%20against%20the%20elements.

[92] I perhaps use Timothy Morton's term loosely (and in reference to earlier metaphysics of substance) to refer to an object which may seem like merely a physical object but in fact acts as the conditions of possibility for several purportedly non-physical effects; a unique set of concepts, forms, norms, desires, dreams, etc. which transforms the perspective (or reality) of the 'object' relative to whether you are inside or outside of it.

[93] Stephen Hawking famously argued that the universe must have begun as a singularity (singularity theorem).

[94] Meillassoux, Quentin, *After Finitude*, Bloomsbury, 2012 version, p. 21.

[95] Ibid., p. 21.

object possesses properties (just as when you observe the make-up of our world one will see everywhere in nature eukaryotic cells which form the basis of the origin and evolution of cells and subsequently living organisms). It is neither the question of sufficient reason that Meillassoux so criticises, because the actuality of the world *presupposes* those laws as part of its Becoming; it is one giant rational object, with the caveat that this specific system of rationality is produced from tellurian, dialectical laws (*necessity is produced* just as it is necessary to adapt within the laws of nature). In other words, the question is not whether 'thought can account for such laws'[96] or "why these laws are thus and not otherwise", it is whether there can be *different laws elsewhere*; different Becomings that make their objects necessary due to their involvement in conditioning their reality (Becoming and its object are identical or absolute in this sense). This is not simply to equate Being and Non-Being with a 'radical contingency' or 'unreason', etc., it is also a provocation to *distinguish between* the movement of the virtual infinite possibilities of Being and Non-Being, and its incarnation into actual mediations of this infinite possibility (i.e. the trans-finite), which appear to *absolutise themselves* in their partial inclusion of both abstract Being and Non-Being within their Becoming. Of course, Hegel found this trans-finite existence in *all objects*, naming it the dialectic, and subsequently naming the object's 'role' or identity '*contradiction as essence*'; the movement of a special type of opposites and negation, implying a kind of absolute status (a Hegelian extrapolation of *universality* which we are now beginning to see as in fact an *absolute particularisation*; not all spaces and times can accommodate the required inter-relationality and entropic specificity that Hegel's dialectic produces (let alone the conditions for sentient thought to be added to this dialectic as if the final missing jigsaw piece)).

It is interesting to note that, while Hegel see's all objects within the earth as undergoing this larger absolute movement, as an "independence which can only be attributed to the whole into which sides, aspects, or moments enter",[97]Harman picks up on a similar "independence" iterated in every individual object; the absolute (*earthly* for Hegel) distinction

[96] Ibid., p. 33.

[97] Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Foreword ix. Oxford University Press. 1977.

*vicariously translated* into each *individual object* as if refracting this absolute independence or self-determined nature like how a crystal refracts a single internal structure outwardly. The problem of *the sensual* makes this all too apparent; no object can fully touch or exhaust the other, and just as the sensual supplies some sort of indirect bridge between various independent objects, so too it supplies some sort of artificial contact with the various planets and stars that are attuned to varyingly *different* conditions of possibility.

In this sense, regarding correlationism and speculation, there need not be one at the expense of the other (i.e. a critical/sceptical correlationism or a fully blown pre-critical realist metaphysics). The enquiry into whether *thought is correlated to being* does not have to be the same enquiry as to whether *being and thought can be defined independently of each other*. This essay formulates a way of thinking that gives a resounding yes to both; we humans are correlated to the earth as a product of its peculiar spatio-temporal, gravitational, physical and chemical context. There is no escaping such, just as there is no escaping the trace of this belonging or identity as it is exhibited in every molecule, cell and chemical element belonging to our planet. But to be aware of the tellurian correlation is to make room for an alien object of Becoming distinct from our own: and to think this (or at least to *attempt* to think this) returns us to the Kantian lineage of *thinking the noumenal but not knowing it*. Our thought is correlated to our Being (or our specific *Becoming of* Being) which is not without a hint of Heidegger. Yet, speculating upon the radical alterity of different Becomings suggests that our thinking can point to (or *index*) both an abstract Being and Non-Being and possible Becomings defined independently of human thought. An interesting point here is that—whilst areas of experimental physics, astronomy, cosmology and mathematics may point us towards the infinite potentiality of Being or the existence of different Becomings (object-oriented realities)—the framework or conditions of those discourses can only posit "those parts of the multiverse where the laws of mathematics and physics allow stable information processing and reliable predictions".[98] In other words, these 'absolute'

[98] A.L. Cambridge University preprint, Nuffield Symposium, July 1982 or chrome-extension: https://www.scientificlib.com/en/Astronomy/Cosmology/ChaoticInflationTheory.html.

discourses (e.g. mathematics) cannot unbind themselves from various *relative* conditions. Kant's *a priori* is only *prior to experience*, and this ostensibly analytical model is still fettered by displaced *synthetic* conditions such as 'extension' since such is "indissociable from sensible representation: one cannot imagine an extension which would not be coloured, and hence which would not be associated with a secondary quality".[99] Making a similar point but from an inverse angle, Tristan Garcia argues for the existence of entities which refute conventional physics and mathematics (such as that of a "squared circle") which "all have a right to poetic existence".[100]

The pressing need is to delineate where the correlation ends (as an object containing both its properties and qualities and its own thought/translation, i.e., its correlated reality) and where a non-correlational (or *other* correlational) Becoming starts. From the outset this would presuppose a multiplicity of different non-tellurian Becomings and their immanent "self-relating productivity". Yet, whether the plurality of possible objects containing their conditions of reality (whether *weak* such as planets or *strong* such as multiverses) can separate themselves from this initial correlation of *product and produced* seems unlikely. Are all Becoming-Objects destined to withdraw into their own reality, their own internal translation? What if—like Harman—every object is trapped within this correlation? Regarding Meillassoux, could the uncorrelated affirmation of the existence of different *Becoming-Objects* of Being and Non-Being be *formalisable* in some way, and would this formalisation (presumably made through complex probability machines) result in us knowing these other Becomings or just their *possibility*? Yet, if it is the latter, does this not in fact suggest that we have come to know some *aspect of* Being and Non-Being due to their hypothetical existence as *simply possibility and potentiality* (as their actual 'reality' would be exhibited only in the *Becoming* that indirectly actualises the two?). Furthermore, if current probability machines depend on physics (physical constants) and mathematics, then we return to the problem of translating a Becoming which simply traverses such models (Linde's insistence that we can only posit "those parts

[99] Meillassoux, Quentin, *After Finitude*, Continuum, 2011 edition, p. 3.
[100] Garcia, Tristan, *Form and Object*, Edinburgh University Press, p. 263.

of the multiverse where the laws of mathematics and physics allow stable information processing and reliable predictions") and therefore we really are stuck in the general spatio-temporal, physical, etc., actuality that our Becoming-Object exhibits.

One way of reading Hegel in the age of non-anthropocentrism, post-humanism and speculative realism is to chart the self-contained absolute stages of earth where the *Being* of its Becoming slowly becomes comprehended through the process of its own expression (using Hegel's terminology—from implicit to explicit). This allows us to keep tabs on an image of Becoming that was once unfamiliar with the earth's metamorphosis of thought (i.e. this reading goes against the one-dimensionally idealist and correlationist readings of Hegel) whilst allowing for human and animal ideation to be integrated into stages of the earth as part of its ongoing production of reality. But more importantly, Hegel's tellurian metaphysics posits *Becoming* as a singular, unique determination of Being, one that "does not identify a necessary sequence of phases with the *only* possible sequence that can be taken", and therefore, this unique Becoming—of the object—is a *singular formof Being* (actualised Being as Becoming) which emerges from the multiple 'possibilisation'[101] of Being qua the Becoming-Object.

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[101] To become possible.

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